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NOVEMBER 2021

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Widget Finn
Widget is a business journalist and garden writer. She recently downsized from a two-acre garden and is enjoying the challenge of gardening in miniature. She visits Feeringbury Manor on page 48.

Bennet Smith
Bennet divides his time between managing the Marianne Majerus Photo Library and garden photography, through which he aims to share his love of plants with others. His photos of Eagleswood are on page 59.

Annaïck Guitteny
Annaïck travels the UK and Europe – especially her home country of France – to photograph gardens and plants, and she also works on personal projects. Her images of autumn camellias appear on page 83.

IMAGES NEIL HEPWORTH; TANYA HAMILTON

Welcome

I have been thinking about soil a lot recently, namely, whether I should create areas for planting in my new garden using the no-dig technique. My default, old-school method would be to dig borders, but the idea of having fewer weeds to deal with is very appealing, and it would also be an excellent way to recycle packing boxes from the move (you lay cardboard on the ground and then cover it with heaps of compost). On page 97, Sue Bradley explores no-dig and other ways we can look after our soil, boost its health and make our gardening more climate-friendly: a win-win situation for everyone.

It's all made me quite envious of the autumnal gardens in this issue, with their well-established planting looking so beautiful as leaves on trees and shrubs turn and start to fall. Whether it's *Parcevall Hall* in Yorkshire, *Hergest Croft* in Herefordshire or *Feeringbury Manor* in Essex, these gardens are a sensation during this season. They must have started somewhere though, and it's thanks to the original vision of their owners and gardeners that they are so richly colourful and full of interest now. Hopefully some of their forward-thinking creativity will rub off on me as we approach tree- and shrub-planting time – I just need to get those new borders started.

Clare

CLARE FOGGETT, EDITOR

ON THE COVER
The burn at Logie House is lined with colourful, autumnal perennials such as persicaria and rodgersia. Photographed by Ray Cox.

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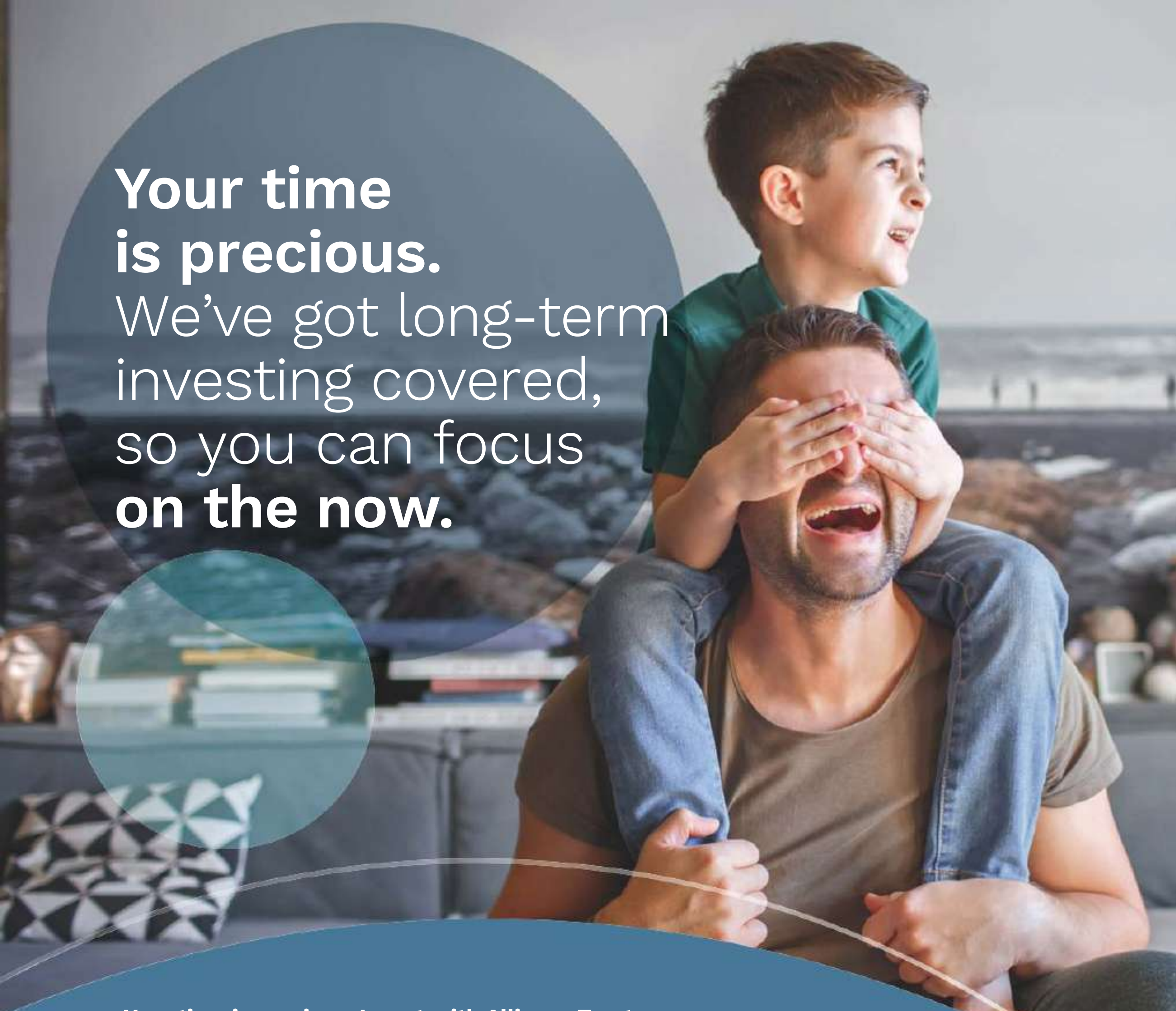

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1. As rated by Willis Towers Watson.

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40 Hergest Croft This arboretum and garden in the Welsh Marches hosts many unusual trees, some dating back to the glory days of the Victorian plant hunters.

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IMAGES RICHARD BLOOM; MMGI/BENNET SMITH; NICOLA STOCKEN; ANNAÏCK GUITTENY; SHUTTERSTOCK; GAP/RICHARD BLOOM

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People to Meet

Introducing the gardeners and public figures we most admire in British horticulture

Christine Skelmersdale

The owner of specialist nursery Broadleigh Bulbs is a photographer, writer and RHS consultant – but a passionate teacher first and foremost

I trained to be a geography teacher, intending to follow my family into tertiary education, but married a horticulturist – so my life took a dramatic turn! In 2002 I was made an honorary fellow at Lancaster University and, in the speech I gave, I explained that my curious life has resulted in me teaching the parents of students rather than students themselves!

I still think of myself as a teacher, whether I'm lecturing on plants or gardening, writing a book or an article, or showing off plants in my photography or at flower shows. For 12 years I advised on the garden at Rosemoor and I'm still very involved with the RHS. I'm also proud to be part of the group who pushed to establish the new University of Bristol Botanic Garden.

My husband and I took on Broadleigh Gardens in 1972. It was founded in the 1930s by Alec Gray, who bred miniature daffodils like 'Tête-à-Tête'. We bought his stock and expanded the range. In 1981, my husband became a government minister, which left me to run the business, create a garden, restore the house and bring up two children: a steep learning curve! He was supportive during those years, but we did have one unwritten rule. I, rather than the government, had a three-line whip on his time over Chelsea week!

When we first arrived at our house in Somerset, cows were grazing at the front door. Now, there's a nursery filled with agapanthus, crocosmia and iris; a walled garden with a parterre; herbaceous borders and a big terrace; and the wild garden with its pond and masses of trees and bulbs.

The nursery now focuses on South African bulbs such as nerines, agapanthus and eucomis which grow well here along with iris in many forms. We also hold the National Collection of Alec Gray miniature daffodils.

For autumn planting, large pots are an easy way to inject colour. Try small daffs like 'Toto' with muscari, *Anemone blanda* and tulips for a long display. They can be packed in and planted in layers. For lawns, use tough Cyclamineus hybrids like 'February Gold' and 'Jack Snipe'. These have been growing under our cherry trees for over 40 years. *broadleighbulbs.co.uk*

INTERVIEW PHOEBE JAYES **IMAGES** LILY NICHOLAS; RHS

RECOMMENDED

Christine's favourite gardens

RHS Rosemoor

Devon

I've been involved with this garden's design and planting since it was a bare field. It's superb in every season, with magnificent plant collections. It's the best big garden in the UK. *Tel: 01805 624067; rhs.org.uk*

University of Bristol Botanic Garden

Bristol

I became a member of the botanic garden in 1972. Enjoy trails that explore plant evolution, big greenhouses and a sizeable collection of Mediterranean plants. *Tel: 0117 4282041; botanic-garden.bristol.ac.uk*

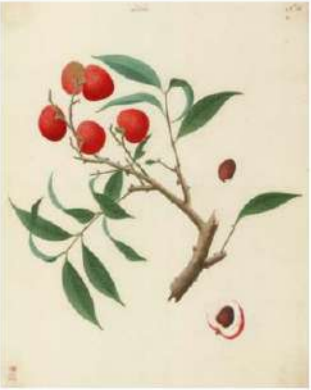
NOVEMBER

Out & About

Unmissable events, news and the very best gardens to visit this month

RHS launches Planet-Friendly Gardening Campaign

A national campaign to encourage the UK's 30 million gardeners to adopt more sustainable practices in the garden was launched in Parliament this September as part of the RHS's new Sustainability Strategy. The organisation has come up with a list of ten achievable actions for gardeners, including 'go peat free', 'make your own compost' and 'pull up a paving slab', and will be sharing further gardening advice online and at RHS shows over the coming months. Find out more and discover the full list of actions at *rhs.org.uk*



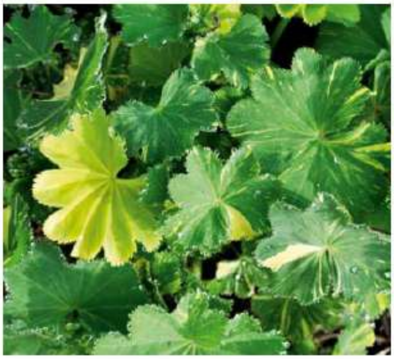
The Artistic Legacy of Joseph Banks

18 September 2021 – 13 January 2022, London

Discover the artworks and manuscripts of English naturalist and botanist Joseph Banks (1743-1820) in this fascinating exhibition at London's Natural History Museum. Banks was one of the most influential people in British science in the late 1700s, and his work dramatically changed how people understood the natural world and made use of its resources. Highlights from the exhibition include original artworks and a herbarium specimen from Captain Cook's Endeavour voyage of 1768-1771, as well as early 18th-century botanical depictions by Johann Jacob Dillenius. Tickets: free. *nhm.ac.uk*

Claire Austin introduces Alchemilla 'Cream Dream'

The beautiful new *Alchemilla mollis* 'Cream Dream' was found by Claire Austin some years ago in her garden at White Hopton Farm in Powys, Wales, and is now available for sale. This variety has round, soft green, scallop-edged leaves splashed with cream, with a froth of tiny lime-green flowers from May to August. Unlike many variegated plants, the variegation on the leaves is incredibly stable. Buy for £7.50, exclusively from *claireaustin-hardyplants.co.uk*



ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

National Garden Scheme lecture

16 November, London

The theme of this lecture is 'My Garden Saved my Life'. Robin Hanbury-Tenison was hospitalised with Covid-19 in 2020 and given a 5% chance of survival, while Rachel de Thame was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2018. The two discuss the role gardens played in their recovery. Tickets to attend in person at the Royal Geographical Society or watch online are £25. All proceeds go to the National Garden Scheme. *ngs.org.uk*

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NOVEMBER

Things to Do

Keep up to date in the garden with our monthly guide to key gardening tasks from **Troy Scott Smith,** head gardener at Iford Manor

Prune OLD ROSES

When we refer to 'old roses', we mean all those that were bred before 1867 when the first Hybrid Tea, 'La France' appeared. They are divided up into several groups: Centifolias, Albas, Gallicas, Mosses, Damasks and Bourbons. We can also include more modern roses in the same category in so far as pruning is concerned. These include the Hybrid Musks, a group of roses bred in the 1920s and invaluable for their health, vigour, free flowering and scent, and the Hybrid Perpetuals, a fusion between the Bourbons and almost any other parent that came along.

Unlike modern roses, unless judicious and skilled winter pruning is carried out, the blooms of all these old roses will be few and fleeting. The technique involves pulling the long supple wands of this season's growth down into an arc and anchoring them in position. This stops the sap simply rising to the top of each stem and encourages flowers from every joint.

The basic principles of removing dead, diseased, weak and crossing growth is the same and all the remaining shoots should be shortened by about a third. A proportion of older wood should be removed completely to encourage strong growth shoots from the base. A balance between production of flowering wood and growth wood to form a framework is ideal. Remember, the harder you prune and the less bend you put on a shoot, the more extension growth will be produced. Shoots that are bent more horizontally will be studded with flowers along their entire length.

With the old roses it is more important to make time to deadhead spent flowers – for every perfect bloom there will be another two or three that have finished and will look unsightly unless removed. At Iford we have a group of wonderful volunteers who help year-round but they are especially invaluable in June and July when the roses are at their best and going over fast. *Iford Manor, Iford, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire BA15 2BA. Tel: 01225 863146; iffordmanor.co.uk. Follow Troy on Instagram: @troyscottsmith1*

November checklist Collect seed, tidy hellebores and maintain garden tools

Collect and save seed

Throughout the growing season at Iford, all our plants are deadheaded regularly to keep them producing flowers through summer, but from September they are left to have their final fling and to set seed.

If you haven't already done so, many of these seeds can be collected, and this may be your last chance before the birds or frost take them all. Sometimes all you need to do is shake the flowerhead and the seed will scatter from the pod; other seedpods such as milk thistle, *Silybum marianum*, require more patience; the seed needs to be carefully extracted by hand from the case (above). Each seed type should be poured into separate paper packets, labelled and dated, and placed somewhere out of the light and with a constant temperature until ready to sow the following spring.

Care for hellebores

Several plants benefit from having their old leaves removed. The Lenten rose, *Helleborus* x *hybridus*, is such a plant. The bold leaves will now be shabby so cut them off at ground level, making space for the buds and new leaves to follow. Hellebores are prolific seeders, so look out for seedlings around parent plants. These can be teased out and replanted, but you'll have to wait three years for them to flower.

Don't forget

- Order bare-root fruit trees and bushes now; late autumn and winter is the ideal time of year to plant them.
- Plant out winter bedding such as pansies and violas, heathers and cyclamen for colour in the garden over the coming season.
- Lift dahlia tubers, begonias and gladiolus corms to store in a frost-free shed over the winter months.
- In the vegetable garden, sow overwintering broad beans and peas outside, and net all brassicas if you haven't done so already, to keep hungry birds away

Maintain garden machinery and tools

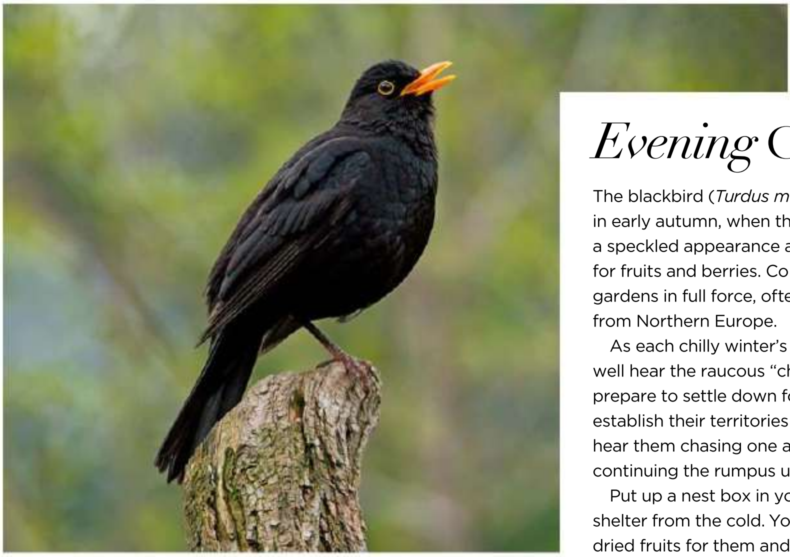
Though there are many jobs that can be tackled in the winter months, sometimes it is just too horrid outside to venture any further than the garden shed. Make use of this time by repairing broken tools, or sharpening secateurs and shears.

IMAGES ALUN CALLENDER: GAP/FRIEDRICH STRAUSS; GARDEN EXPOSURES/ANDREA JONES

NOVEMBER

Nature to Note

The wonder of wildlife in the garden and countryside this month



Evening CHORUS

The blackbird (*Turdus merula*) tends to keep a low profile in early autumn, when they hide away to moult, taking on a speckled appearance and raiding the wider countryside for fruits and berries. Come November, they return to UK gardens in full force, often joined by migrant blackbirds from Northern Europe.

As each chilly winter's day draws to a close, you may well hear the raucous "chinking" call of these birds as they prepare to settle down for the night. Male blackbirds re-establish their territories in late autumn and you will often hear them chasing one another around the garden and continuing the rumpus until dark.

Put up a nest box in your garden to give blackbirds shelter from the cold. You can also put out cheese and dried fruits for them and ensure they have drinking water.

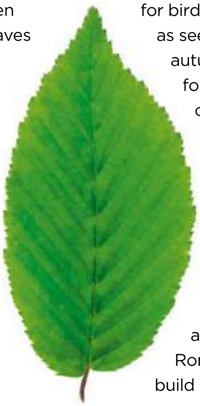
HORNBEAM *(Carpinus betulus)*

How to identify it This gnarled, mighty tree can reach a height of 30m and live for over 300 years. The common hornbeam has pale grey bark that develops ridges with age and a short trunk that's often twisted. Its pointed, oval leaves turn gold in autumn and hang on throughout winter, alongside papery clusters of winged seeds.

Where to find it This tree is planted widely across the UK, although it is native to the south and found growing naturally in oak woodland. Europe is homes to only two species of hornbeam, while some 30-40 species can be found in East Asia.

Value to wildlife The hornbeam is a brilliant asset to wildlife due to its year-round leaf cover. A hornbeam hedge provides shelter, roosting, nesting and foraging opportunities for birds and mammals, as well as seeds for sustenance in the autumn. Hornbeam is also the food plant for the caterpillars of several moth species.

Did you know? Hornbeam timber is the hardest of any tree growing in Europe. It's mainly used for furniture, flooring and wood turning, but was traditionally used to make ox yokes, piano hammers and cogs for windmills. The Romans used hornbeam to build their chariots.



WILDLIFE NEWS

The Great Flood

River Tamar breached to boost wildlife

A project at the National Trust's Cotehele Quay has let water from the Tamar back onto land reclaimed for farming in the Victorian era. Three channels were carved into the farmland followed by a 15m breach in the embankment. The initiative aims to provide more habitats for wildlife, lock in carbon and alleviate flooding. *nationaltrust.org.uk*

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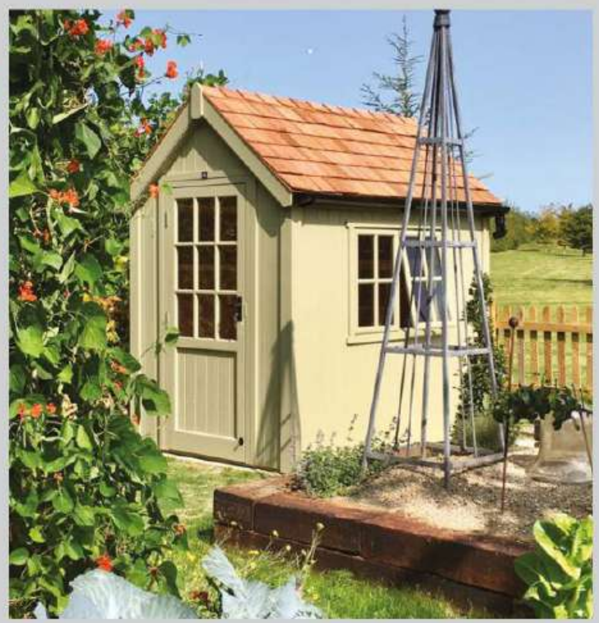

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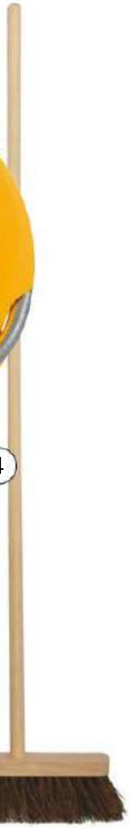

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Gardener's Twine

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Take *Stock*

Use the quieter winter months to catch up on essential garden jobs and get a head start on spring

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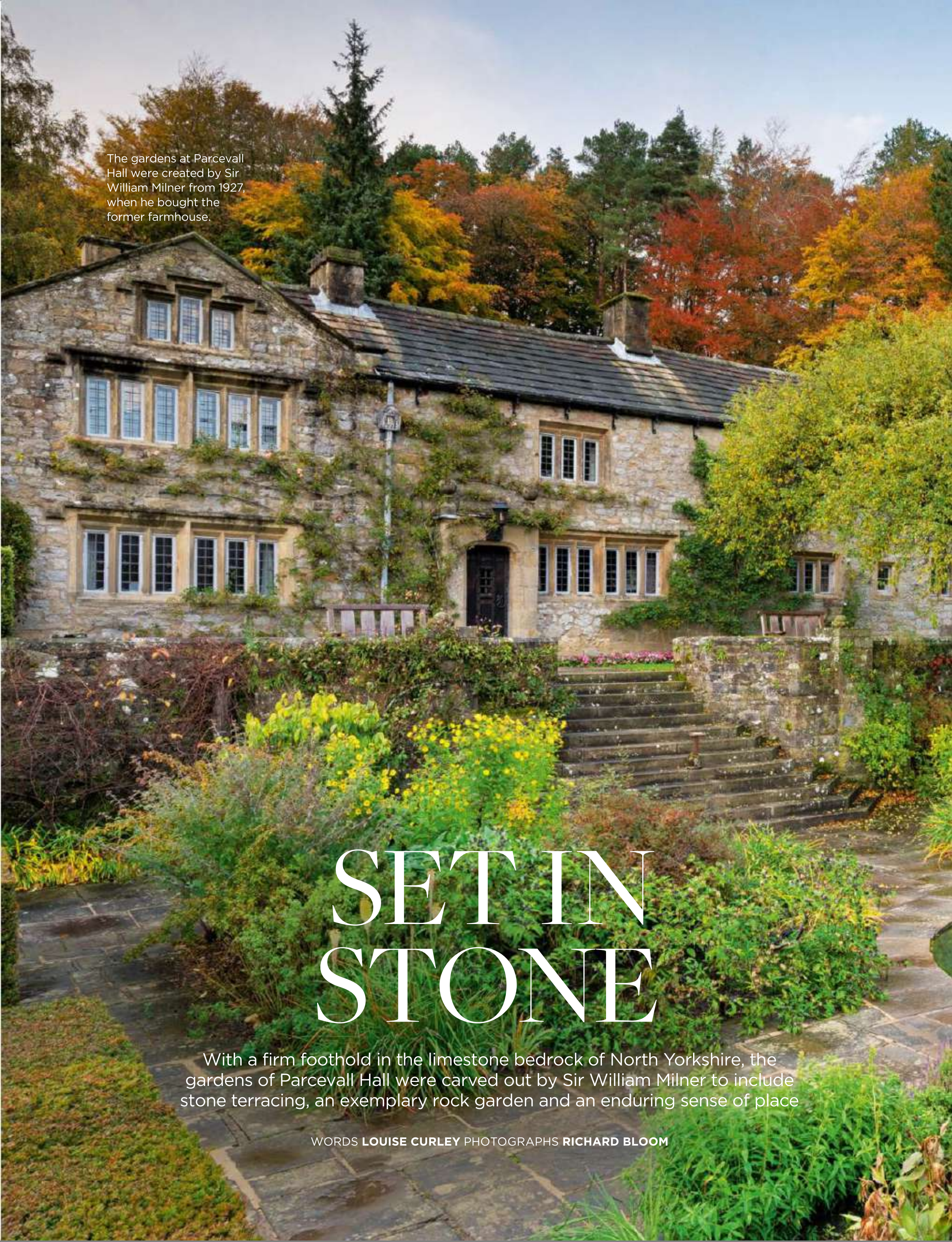
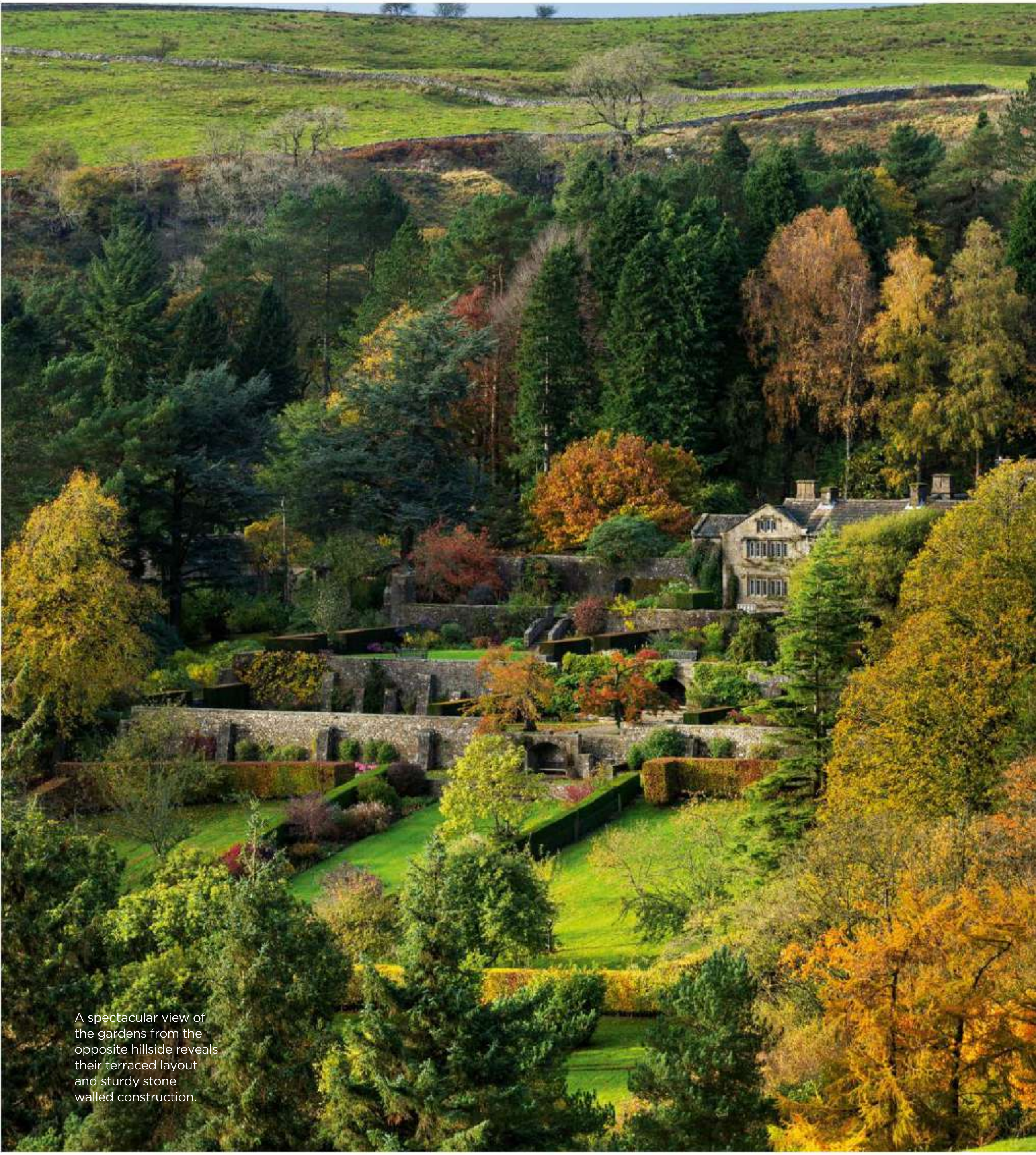


The gardens at Parcevall Hall were created by Sir William Milner from 1927, when he bought the former farmhouse.

SET IN STONE

With a firm foothold in the limestone bedrock of North Yorkshire, the gardens of Parcevall Hall were carved out by Sir William Milner to include stone terracing, an exemplary rock garden and an enduring sense of place

WORDS **LOUISE CURLEY** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**



A spectacular view of the gardens from the opposite hillside reveals their terraced layout and sturdy stone walled construction.

A remote part of the Yorkshire Dales amid the rugged Pennine landscape of dry stone walls, heather-clad moors and fields grazed by hardy sheep is an unlikely place to come across a 20th-century Arts & Crafts garden. Yet in a small valley, tucked away from the nearby tourist hotspot of Wharfedale, is Parcevall Hall, a hidden gem that was created by one of Britain's forgotten horticulturists, Sir William Milner.

The hall was a derelict 16th-century farmhouse when Sir William purchased it along with its surrounding 300 acres in 1927. A man of private means and a trained architect, he set about restoring and enlarging the building to create a gentleman's residence, and carving out a garden that was very much in keeping with the style of the time, with features such as terraces, clipped hedges forming garden rooms, reflective pools and a pergola.

Sir William's love of plants was cultivated as a child by his Aunt Edith. As an adult, his wealth and high-society connections – his godmother was Queen Mary and his sister the Vicereine of India – meant he could pursue his horticultural passion. He conversed with notable garden contemporaries, such as Lawrence Johnston at Hidcote Manor in the Cotswolds and the Hon. Robert James at St Nicholas in nearby Richmond, North Yorkshire. He was also an avid rhododendron hybridiser, sharing plants with Lord Grey of Howick Hall in Northumberland and the Williams family of Caerhays Castle, Cornwall, and he part-funded plant-hunting expeditions to Asia by George Forrest. Sir William was also a founder of the Northern Horticultural Society, helping to establish its garden at Harlow Carr in Harrogate, now the most northerly outpost of the RHS.

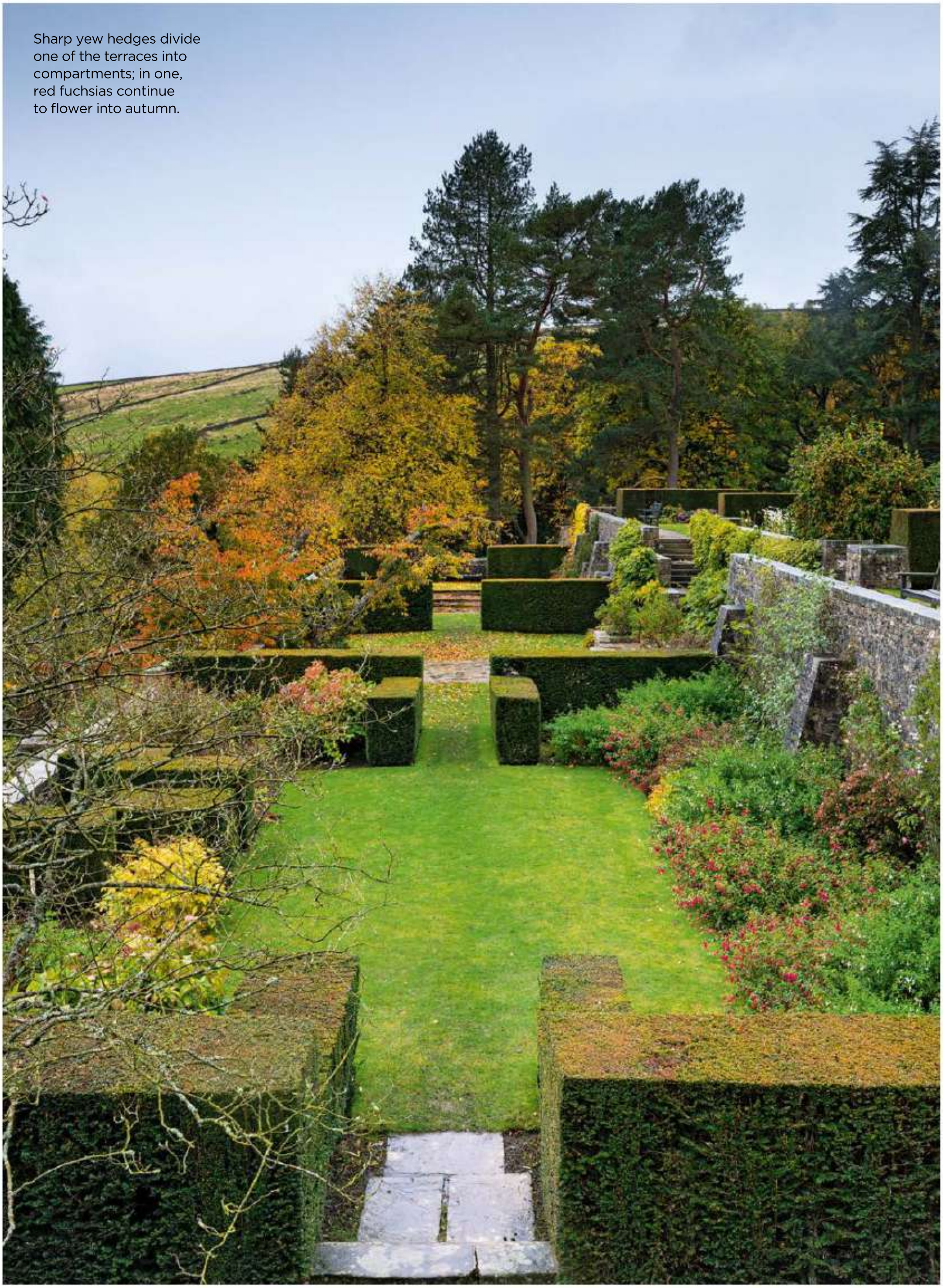
At Parcevall he created a courtyard behind the farmhouse by blasting out large quantities of stone from the hillside, which was then used to construct a series of terraces and monumental buttresses with a solidity that echoes the wider landscape. "He chose well when it came to picking a location for his garden," explains head gardener Phillip Nelson, who looks after the 24 acres with another full-time gardener, one part-time gardener and several volunteers. "Although the garden is between 600 and 800ft above sea level on an exposed Pennine hillside, the area that slopes away from the house is south-facing, the top half of garden sits above limestone, and the bottom half is acid soil, which meant he could grow a fantastic range of plants." The limestone, a geological feature known as the North Craven Fault, forms a band of rock across this part of Yorkshire and Sir William exploited it, scraping back the soil to the bedrock to create one of the garden's star features: its rock garden, which as far as Phillip is aware is the UK's only example of its type.

A religious man, Sir William included subtle Christian symbolism and nods to other world religions within the garden's design. "The arrangement of the terraces is in the form of a cross with the round pond on the main terrace at the centre, and below the terraces are 45 metre-long borders planted with red flowers and purple foliage to signify the blood of Jesus," Phillip explains.

Following Sir William's death in 1960, Parcevall was bequeathed to Walsingham College in Norfolk and the hall is now used as a retreat by the Diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales. The garden, however, fell into a decline until the 1980s when a garden administrator, Jo Makin, was employed as part of a restoration programme. "I joined the garden in 1990," explains Phillip, "and it's been a long process of gradual restoration. In some areas we were rediscovering what was already there, in others we widened paths and borders, and we also rebuilt a dam to reinstate a woodland pond." In the rock garden the pond needed dredging and the vegetation and soil were stripped back to the bare limestone bedrock, as they had been in William's day. Plants that were uncovered were lifted, propagated and replanted, or if they were big enough they were pruned to rejuvenate them.

"Sadly none of Sir William's planting plans or designs for the garden have survived. However, there are records held by the The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, which detail the plant-hunting expeditions that he was involved in, and during her research Jo was able to uncover some of the plants that he had grown. So although we don't stick rigidly to what Sir William would have planted, we do honour the ethos of his style and we do also refer back to Jo's research. For instance, to mark the 125th

Below A beautifully patterned comma butterfly perches on a lingering umbellifer bloom that will soon set seed like those around it.



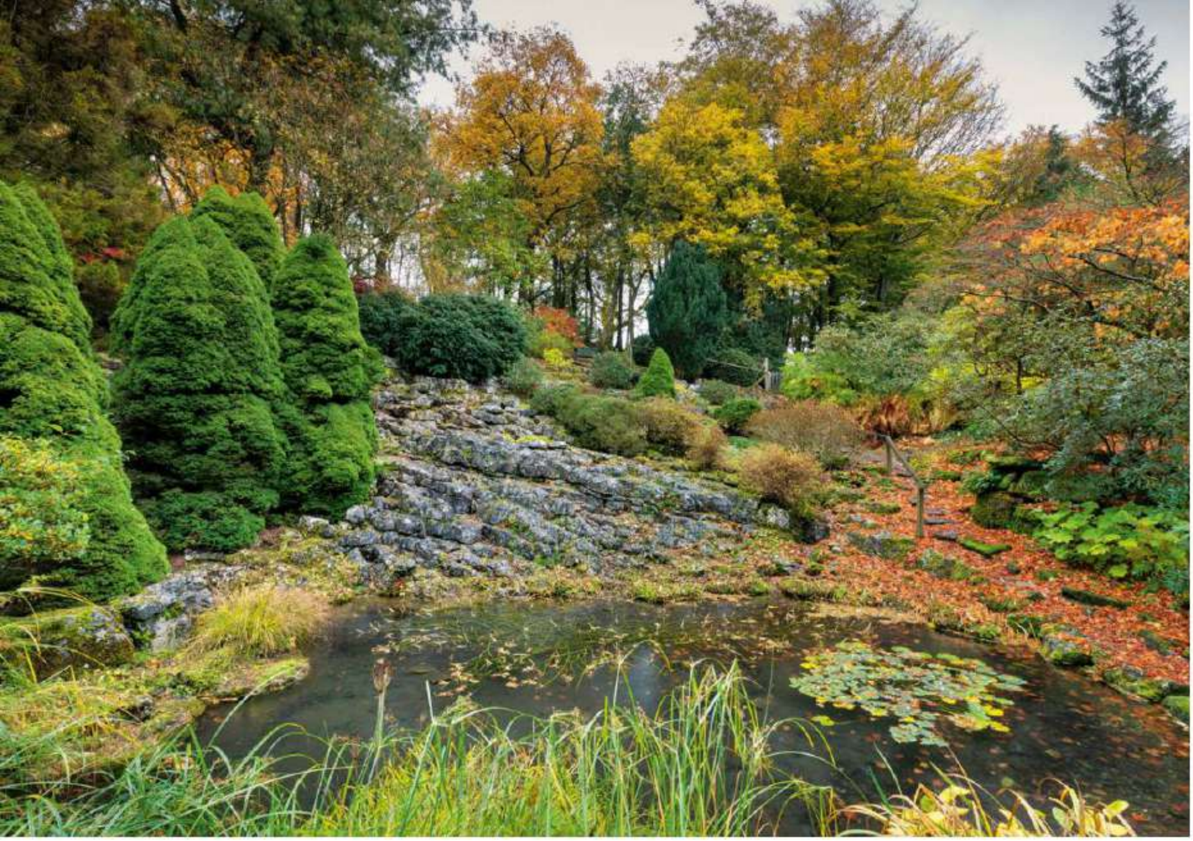
Sharp yew hedges divide one of the terraces into compartments; in one, red fuchsias continue to flower into autumn.

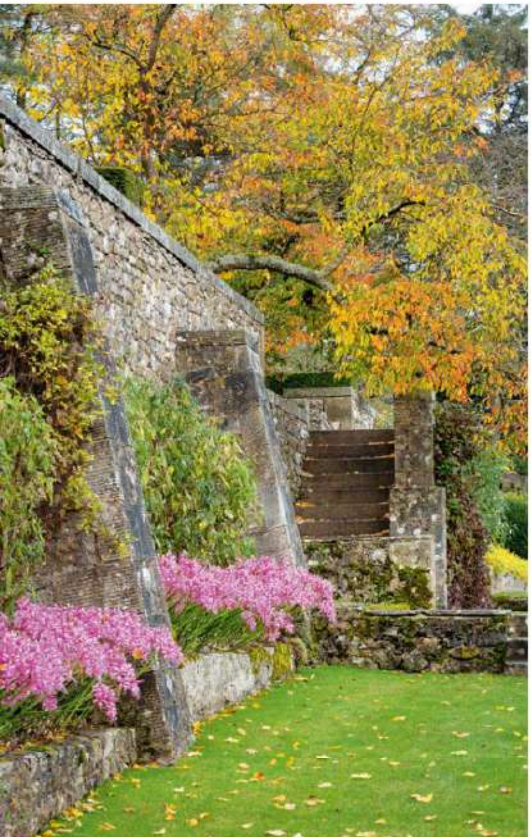
Top This circular pond is the central feature of the main terrace, offering far-reaching views. **Above** Fallen leaves carpet the ground between an informal path of stepping stones. **Left** *Acer* 'Bloodgood' in the Chapel Garden.

anniversary of Sir William's birth we planted a tree, *Prunus* 'Kursar', an ornamental cherry we know he once grew here," Phillip explains.

Before Sir William came here, there would have been few trees on this windswept landscape, but he planted firs and deciduous specimens around the garden, with a patch of woodland known as Tibet Wood planted in 1944 by Italian prisoners of war and intended to provide shelter from south-westerly winds. "It's arguable whether the shelterbelt ever had a significant impact in his lifetime as the trees would have been too young, although the garden does benefit from it now," Phillip observes. After a visit from the Tree Register's inspectors earlier this year, 14 trees in the gardens have been awarded Champion status on account of their size, age, rarity or historical significance, including an impressive *Acer griseum*.

Parcevall's gardens zing with life in spring and are a magical spot in the height of summer, but it's a

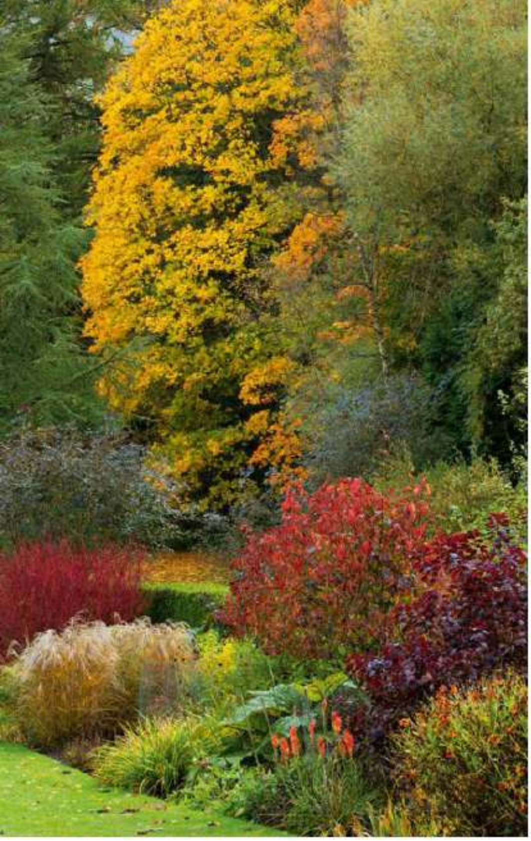




Top The rock garden and pond needed work to restore it to Sir William Milner's original vision. **Above** Evergreen hart's tongue fern, *Asplenium scolopendrium* 'Crispum Bolton's Nobile'. **Left** *Nerine bowdenii* thrives at the base of one of the buttressing walls.

mellow beauty that takes over as the days shorten and atmospheric mists cloak the fells. On the terraces, ballerina-like fuchsia blooms dangle from arching stems; the fluffy bottlebrush-like flowers of *Actaea matsumurae* 'White Pearl' fill the air with their fragrance; and the purple daisies of *Symphyotrichum* 'Little Carlow' and vibrant pink nerines provide splashes of colour. In the rock garden, the unusual pink and white flower spikes of the Himalayan native *Morina longifolia* are still blooming alongside a white haze of *Saxifraga* 'Rubrifolia'. The red borders glow with the fiery foliage of *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple', the silvery plumes of *Miscanthus sinensis*, and the red stems of *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica', which emerge as their summer coat of green foliage takes on gold and orange hues before falling to the ground.

The Chapel Garden is a tranquil spot, an enclosed space with a water cascade where the dramatic red foliage of *Acer* 'Bloodgood' shines alongside pink sedums, the gold and brown tones of fading hostas



Above The red borders glow with scarlet *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica' stems, maroon *Cotinus* 'Royal Purple' and miscanthus.

and the russet hues of *Rhus typhina*. "Keeping a garden looking good at this time of year is about aiming for an overall effect rather than relying too heavily on trees, since their displays are over all too quickly if the weather isn't kind," says Phillip. "Make the most of plants that produce colourful foliage as they die back, such as hostas and ferns, and combine these with perennials like persicaria, sedums and asters that come into their own in autumn."

Great gardens are much more than a collection of plants within an attractive design. Great gardens have something else: a spirit, a sense of place that stays with the visitor long after they've left. "It's easy to get blasé about working somewhere like this, but I used to work down the coal mines in Nottingham, so I always try to remember how I first felt when I came here," says Phillip. "Parcevall is a really special place, even if you don't know much about plants: it's the tranquillity, the bird life – the connection with nature that matters." ■

Parcevall Hall, Skyreholme, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 6DE. Open daily, 10am to 6pm, 1 April to 31 October. Tel: 01756 720311; *parcevallhallgardens.co.uk*

The Late SHIFT

Rich autumn colour continues late into the season courtesy of these hard workers

COTINUS 'ROYAL PURPLE'

Purple leaves turn blood-red in autumn, and look wonderful backlit by the sun.

ACTAEA 'WHITE PEARL'

An elegant late perennial with white bottle-brush flowers, which thrives in moist shade.

KNIPHOFIA 'TAWNY KING'

Cream pokers rise from mounds of strappy leaves, darkening as they age.

LEUCANTHEMELLA SEROTINA

Fresh white daisy flowers late into autumn on this large perennial, reaching 1.8m.

MISCANTHUS 'KLEINE FONTÄNE'

Long-lasting silky seedheads make this imposing 1.5m grass an enduring presence.

MORINA LONGIFOLIA

This prickly perennial bears spires of flowers that turn pink as they are pollinated.

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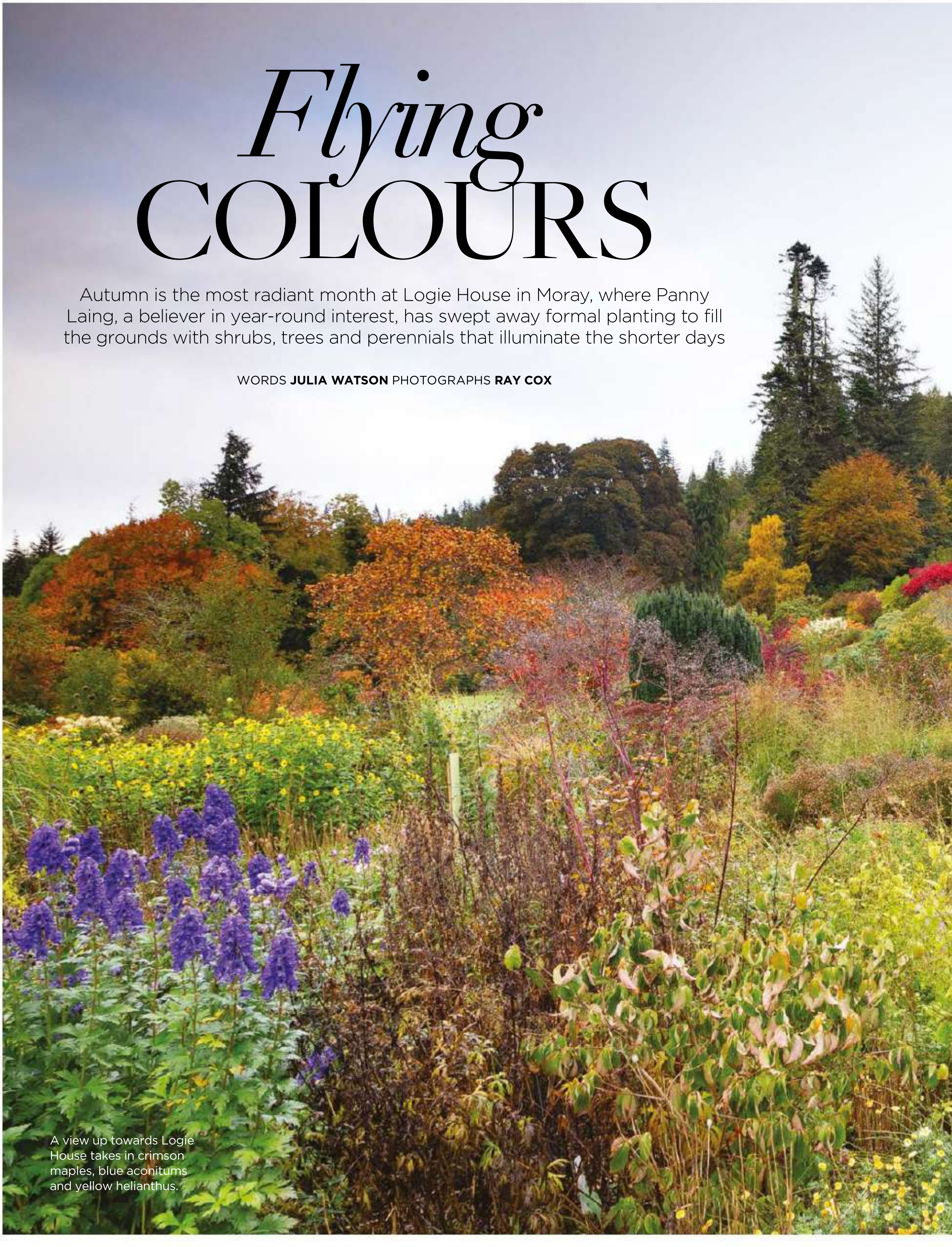
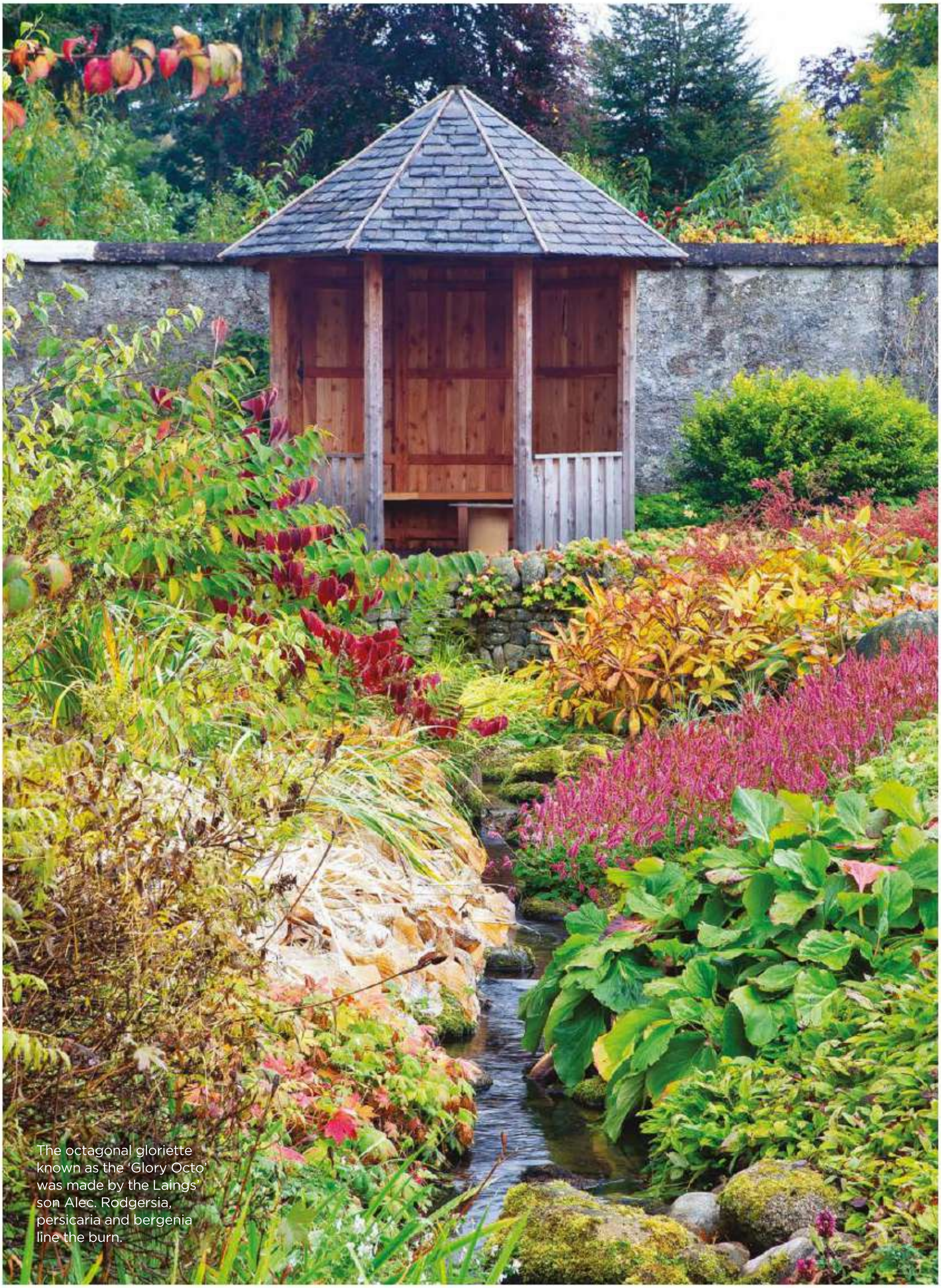
Flying COLOURS

Autumn is the most radiant month at Logie House in Moray, where Panny Laing, a believer in year-round interest, has swept away formal planting to fill the grounds with shrubs, trees and perennials that illuminate the shorter days

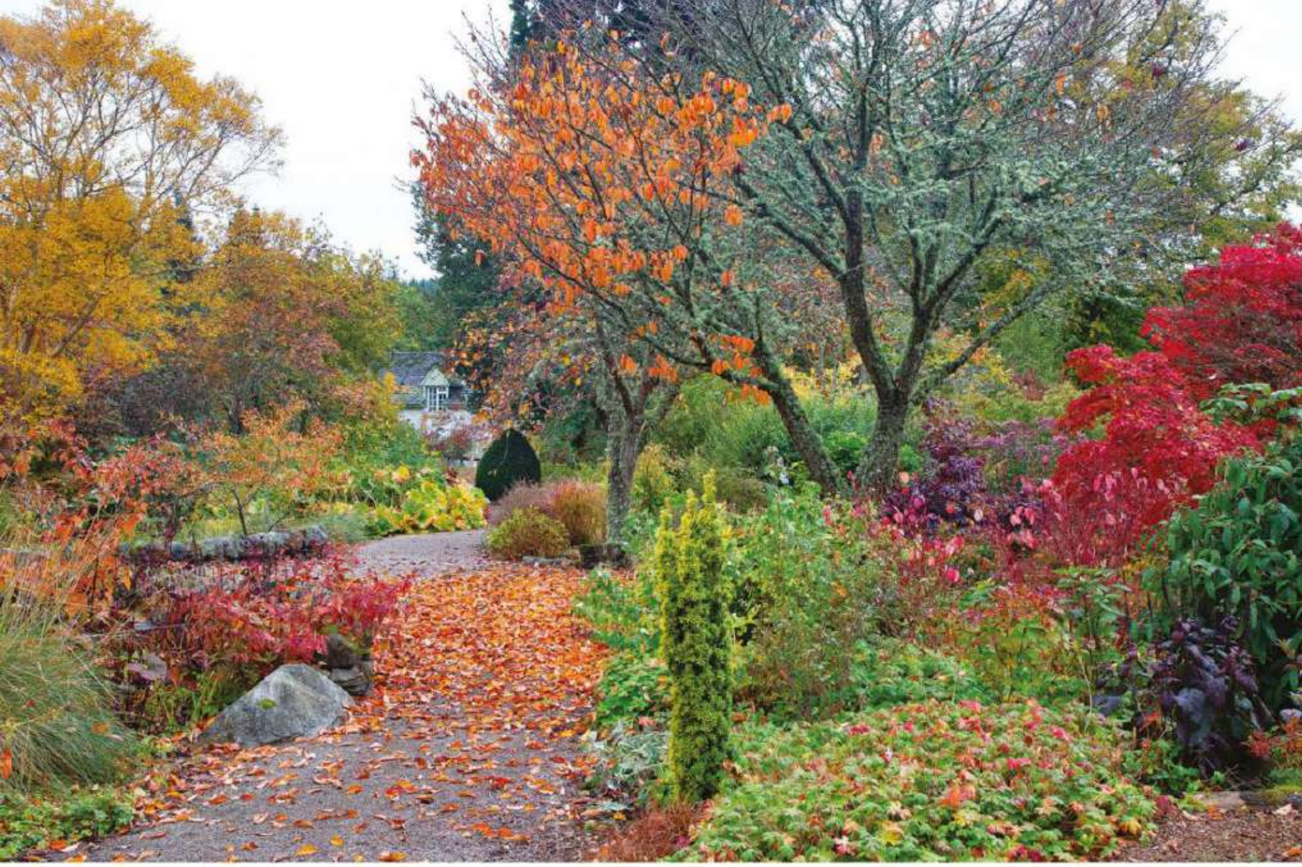
WORDS **JULIA WATSON** PHOTOGRAPHS **RAY COX**



A view up towards Logie House takes in crimson maples, blue aconitums and yellow helianthus.



The octagonal gloriette known as the 'Glory Octo' was made by the Laings' son Alec. Rodgersia, persicaria and bergenia line the burn.



Autumn is a colourful season in the walled garden of Logie House, but it has not always been that way. Panny Laing has transformed the five-acre garden she and her husband Alasdair inherited some 30 years ago, sweeping away formality, planting a mass of trees and shrubs and opening up a long-buried burn. The result is a scenic space that holds interest all year round but positively glows with colour as the days shorten.

Looking down over the River Findhorn in the north-east corner of Scotland, Logie House dates back to the early 18th century. It is at the heart of an estate that has been in Alasdair's family since 1924, when it was bought by his great-great grandfather, Alexander Grant, a local boy made good, who rose from modest origins as an apprentice baker in Forres to become owner of McVitie's, and who was famed for inventing their iconic digestive biscuit.

When Panny and Alasdair swapped houses with Alasdair's mother in 1991 and moved into Logie House with their three children, the walled garden below it, leading down to the river, held vegetables, soft fruit and a cutting garden. There was also a herbaceous border and a formal parterre, for which thousands of antirrhinums and begonias were grown each year and dug out at the end of summer. "There was lovely colour from June to September, but then there was all this bare earth," Panny recalls.

Having grown up with a woodland garden in Kent, she was a staunch believer that gardens should be places of interest all year round, so she decided to put in trees and shrubs to augment the handful of apple trees already there and make more growing spaces for perennials. She also aimed to simplify what she describes as "fiddly bits" of hedge, lawn and flowerbed to create a layout that flowed more easily.

It was not just an aesthetic issue. As she points out, "When you garden, every time you change from bed to grass to path, it's hard work because there's an edge to take care of." The garden in her mother-in-law's day required a full-time gardener, but by making it less labour-intensive, Panny hoped she might be able to run it herself with part-time help.

Above Golden *Betula ermanii* on the left, bright red *Acer micranthum* on the right. Amber prunus leaves blanket the path. **Below** Panny Laing, with a tray of 'Discovery' apples ready to be juiced for the farm shop.

Trained as a paper conservator, Panny brought an artistic eye to the task, but she also sought the advice of local designer and plantsman Gavin Dallmeyer, who had helped the Laings with the garden at their previous home, just a mile away. "Gavin, who sadly died not long ago, was a knowledgeable plantsman, with a natural eye for design," she says. Together they rationalised the design and planted specimens to bring height and visual interest to the garden, including 20 fruit trees and a double shrub border where an old polytunnel had once stood.

As the new introductions matured, the shelter they created had a marked effect on conditions in the garden. "There are tall trees outside the garden on one side, but when we first moved in it went straight from the tall trees down to the wall and flat down to the garden level, so there was no microclimate at all," says Panny, "but in 2008 I vividly remember walking in and feeling it, and thinking 'wow, we're going to be able to grow some things here'."

Excited by the possibility of expanding the range of plants, Panny hatched the idea of opening up the burn that ran through a pipe under the garden. Originally diverted through a pipe because it caught some of the effluent from the dairy, with the dairy herd gone it was now possible to open it up again. The pipe had regularly – and annoyingly – been blocked by hedge roots previously, so opening it up made good sense all round. As before, Panny enlisted Gavin's help with the plans for this second phase of the garden's transformation, although carrying out the actual work took a great deal longer than anyone could have anticipated.

"We took off the topsoil, and piled it in the middle of the lawn, so we had Mount Everest sitting there for what we thought was going to be one winter but actually turned into three years," says Panny. The digger driver contracted to carve out a bed for the burn was one of the estate's tenant farmers, and the dry stone dyker building the bridges and walls mainly worked as a ghillie, so both were available only in winter, and Moray promptly suffered two of the coldest and snowiest winters in many years. But in the third winter the project was finally completed,

Below A view down to the pond, which was made by Panny's parents-in-law, over the colourful leaves of deciduous azaleas.

Above left Seeds and coral-coloured foliage of *Acer griseum*.
Above right Purple leaves of *Cotinus* 'Grace' blaze red when the sun shines through them.
Right A self-sown *Euonymus europaeus* drips with carmine-pink berries next to richly coloured *Cotinus coggygria* 'Royal Purple'.

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Above The fiery autumn colours of deciduous shrub *Enkianthus campanulatus,* which thrives on acid soil.

and the burn once again flowed down through the garden, its banks planted with moisture-lovers and woodlanders like rodgersia, hostas, omphalodes and *Corydalis elata*. It was well worth the wait.

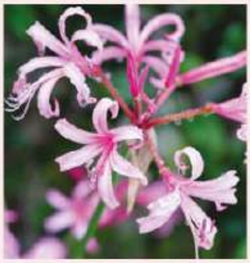
Wandering around the garden today highlights how much has changed. Autumn colour now comes from trees such as *Betula ermanii*, which Panny loves for its pale cream bark and butter-coloured foliage – "People get so excited about *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*, but it just turns a boring brown" – or the spindle tree, *Euonymus europaeus*, which bears spectacular red and orange fruits. There are cotinus, with dark purple leaves that light up red in the sun, Kashmir rowans with white berries and delights like the prolific crab apple *Malus* 'Harry Baker': "We have to take the fruit off to prevent the branches from breaking," says Panny.

In the borders, late summer colour lingers in the form of pink nerines, blue aconitums, the beautiful white heads of *Hydrangea* 'Annabelle' and the attractive yellow flowers of *Helianthus* 'Lemon Queen'. A plant Panny especially prizes is *Kirengeshoma palmata*, introduced into the garden by Gavin Dallmeyer. "It's part of the hydrangea family and its petals are almost quilted."

With children and, now, grandchildren of her own, Panny has made sure that there are features in the garden for youngsters to enjoy. Stepping stones have been put in so that they can hop across the burn, and an old Irish yew, already hollowed by decay, has been carved out even more to make a hidey hole. In the orchard there is a giant stone apple

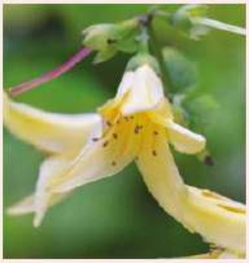
Sugar & SPICE

Late-flowering perennials and shrubs bring sweetshop colour to autumn's gilded shades



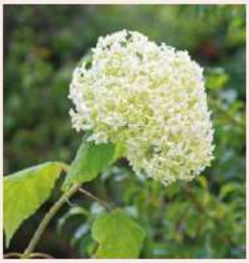
NERINE BOWDENII

Bubblegum-pink flowers are produced by this autumn-flowering bulb, which enjoys a sunny, sheltered spot.



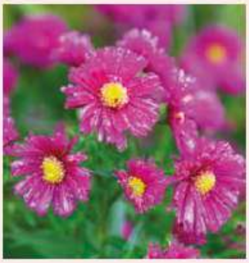
KIRENGESHOMA PALMATA

A choice perennial for light shade, with pale yellow, shuttlecock-shaped flowers.



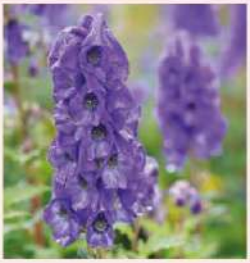
HYDRANGEA 'ANNABELLE'

H. arborescens 'Annabelle' often produces its huge flowerheads into October.



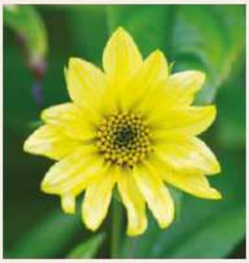
ASTER 'ANDENKEN AN ALMA PÖTSCHKE'

This New England aster (now symphyotrichon) flowers vibrantly throughout autumn.



ACONITUM 'ARENDSII'

Spires of hooded blue-purple flowers on this *A. carmichaelii* cultivar that reaches 1.5m tall.



HELIANTHUS 'LEMON QUEEN'

Masses of yellow daisy flowers brighten up borders from August to autumn. 2m tall.

Above Autumn leaves of *Parrotia persica* display a multitude of vivid hues. **Right** Below the house, pampas grass plumes stand out in a border of shrubs including spiraea.

and a pear made by a local artist.

The garden is far from being Panny's only concern. Soon after she and Alasdair took on the running of the 4,500-acre estate, they received support from the Highlands and Islands Development Board to convert the home farm's former steading buildings into shops and workshops to house independent businesses. The venture has become a renowned success, attracting over 70,000 visitors a year, with a cafe, bookshop, whisky shop, antique restorer and more contributing greatly to the local economy.

Son Alec now has an outlet there for the timber mill he runs – his firm made the garden's 'Glory Octo' gloriette – and Panny herself introduced an art gallery and later a farm and garden shop into the mix, selling local produce, including meat from her small herd of Longhorns, and plants trialled and propagated on site that are suited to local conditions.

Although all these enterprises have grown, Panny still manages to be her own head gardener, these days with the assistance of four part-time staff and volunteer helpers, and WWOOFers, who visit under the auspices of World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. Logie may seem such a peaceful place, but behind the scenes, it's never been busier. ■

Logie House, Dunphail, Forres, Moray IV36 2QN. The gardens are open daily, 10am to 5pm, until 31 December, with donations from the £2 admission charge going to beneficiaries of Scotland's Garden Scheme. Check opening times for 2022 on the website. Tel: 01309 611278; email: *panny@logie.co.uk*; *logie.co.uk*; *scotlandsgardens.org*

A thoughtful APPROACH

Advice from Panny Laing on improving soil, garden design and getting the most from your plants

I call our soil 'improved sandy loam'. It's slightly acid and has been gardened for a long time. When we were putting back the topsoil in the burn garden, we conditioned it with Remin volcanic rock dust (*reminscotland.com*), and we use mulch liberally to help the soil retain its moisture.

In the Burn Garden, Gavin Dallmeyer put in a load of stones at a spot by the path where he wanted to create a calm, plant-free space for people to stop and have a breather. It works.

The Hardy Plant Society's seed scheme is brilliant (available to HPS members, sign up at *hardy-plant.org.uk*). I am especially glad to have acquired a lot of different hardy geraniums, such as *Geranium robustum*, which grows on the bank below the house.

Even if you buy a plant on the spur of the moment – we all do it – don't just plant it anywhere. It is worth taking time to find the exact spot where something is able to grow happily, and where the leaf and the size and the colour work.

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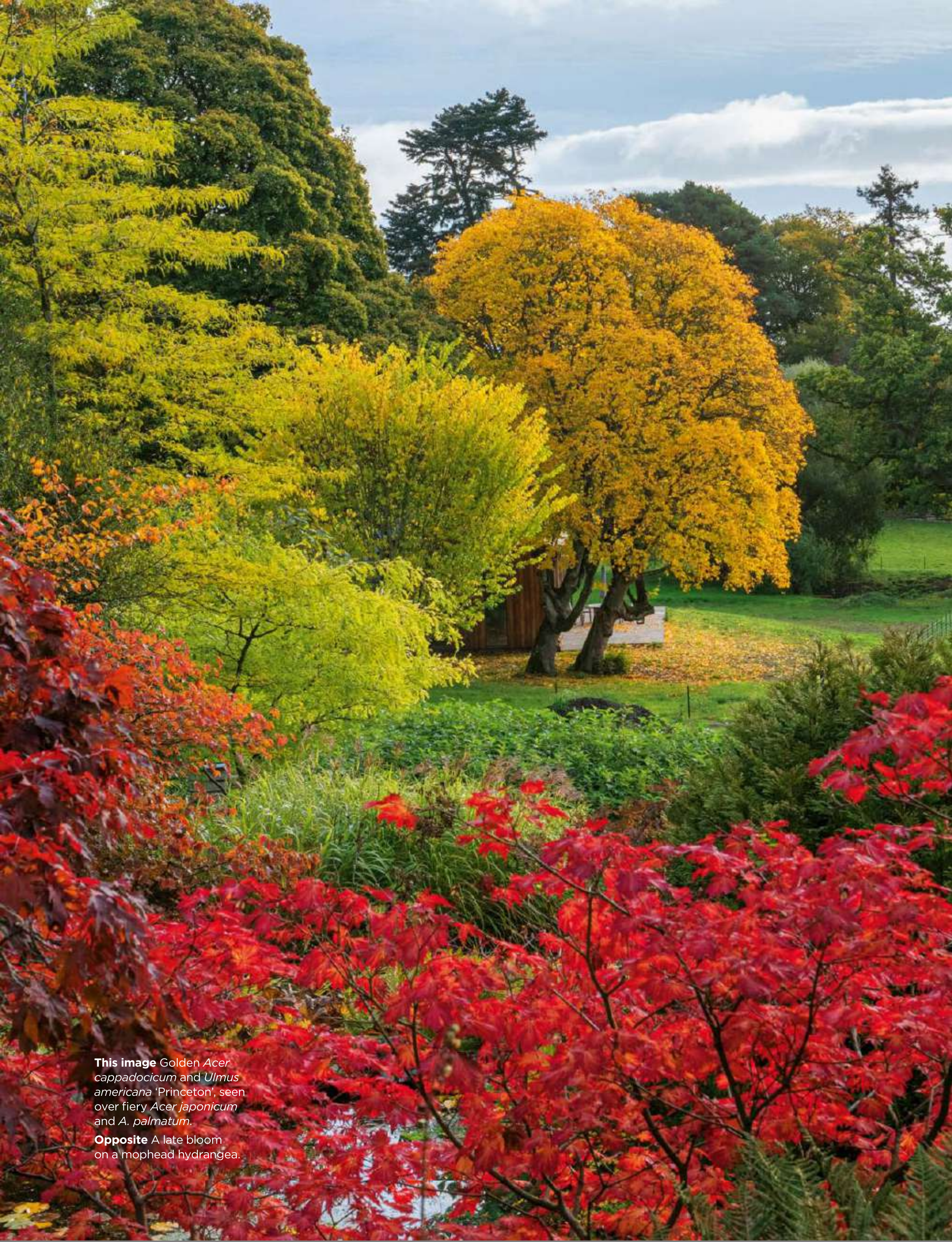


This image Golden *Acer cappadocicum* and *Ulmus americana* 'Princeton', seen over fiery *Acer japonicum* and *A. palmatum*.

Opposite A late bloom on a mophead hydrangea.

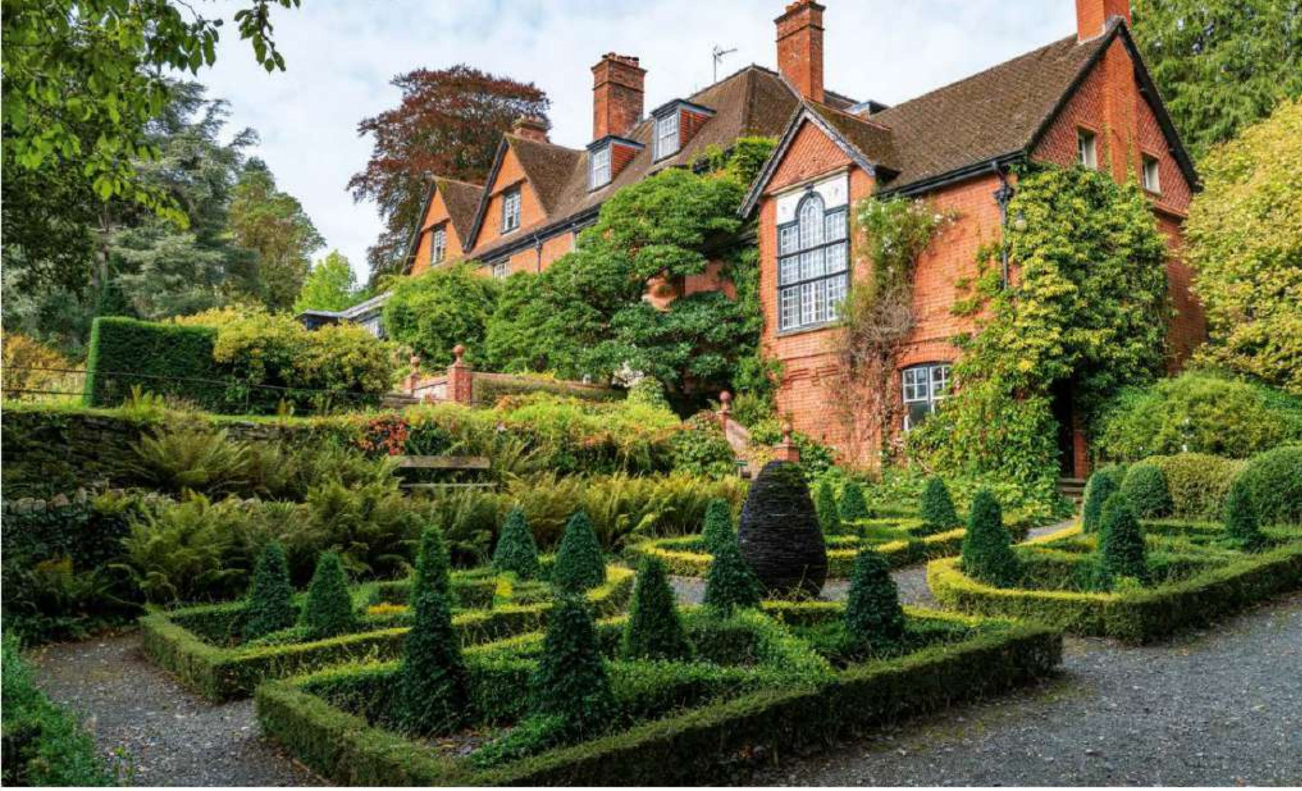
HIMALAYAN HOMAGE

The garden and arboretum at Hergest Croft in the Welsh Marches host a collection of unusual trees, some dating back to the glory days of the Victorian plant hunters, and some more recently introduced

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS **NICOLA STOCKEN**

Magnificent trees lend such great distinction to a landscape and, thanks to five generations of the Banks family, the gardens at Hergest Croft are an incomparable treasure trove of rare specimens planted since Victorian times. "My grandfather introduced many new plants brought back from China in the early 1900s by the plant hunter Ernest Wilson," explains Lawrence Banks who, together with his wife Elizabeth, has cared for the 70-acre garden and arboretum since 1988.

Many of these introductions have since grown into the towering rhododendrons and exotic trees that now fill the secluded woodland valleys, creating scenes that are, says Lawrence, more reminiscent of the Himalayas than the Welsh Marches. Today, the gardens host one of the country's finest privately owned collections of rare plants. Among them, a giant weeping beech looms within a stone's throw of the Arts & Crafts house, while nearby, a pair of *Ginkgo biloba* trees stand ramrod straight. At the end of the



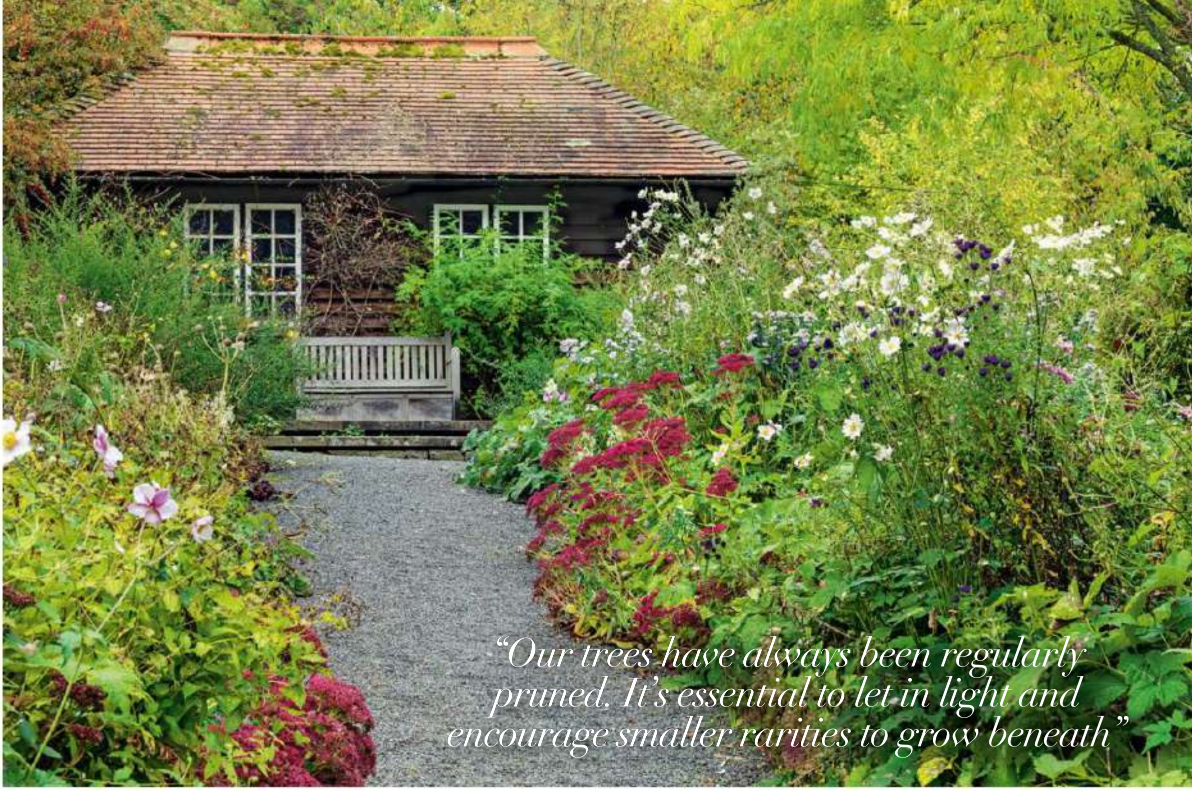
Above The Arts & Crafts house overlooks the Slate Garden with a slate fir cone by Joe Smith. **Left** Elizabeth and Lawrence Banks with their working spaniels Havoc and Honey. **Below right** *Sorbus* x *vertesensis,* a rare rowan with white berries. **Below left** Vivid late colour from the flowers of *Hesperantha coccinea.*

lawn stands a superb *Acer palmatum* 'Sango-kaku' that was planted in 1913 by William Hartland Banks who built the house.

The arboretum is but a short stroll away, home to many exotic trees such as a *Davidia involucrata*, which heralds spring with its white, handkerchief flowers. "These trees have been beautifully planted by people who foresaw what they would look like a century later," says Lawrence, indicating an avenue of blue cedars in the Azalea Garden. "The cedars were planted alternating with unusual conifers, most of which have survived."

Over the past three decades, Lawrence and his wife Elizabeth, a renowned landscape architect, have added to the collection with rare mountain ashes such as *Sorbus splendens*, a new species introduced into cultivation in 1995. "In the early 1980s, plant hunters started bringing back some really unusual plants from China," Lawrence recalls. "Vietnam was opening up and there were some re-introductions from the Himalayas; it was all hugely exciting."

One of their first introductions was *Acer sieboldianum*, a rare, small, slow-growing specimen that turns the most glorious shade of crimson in



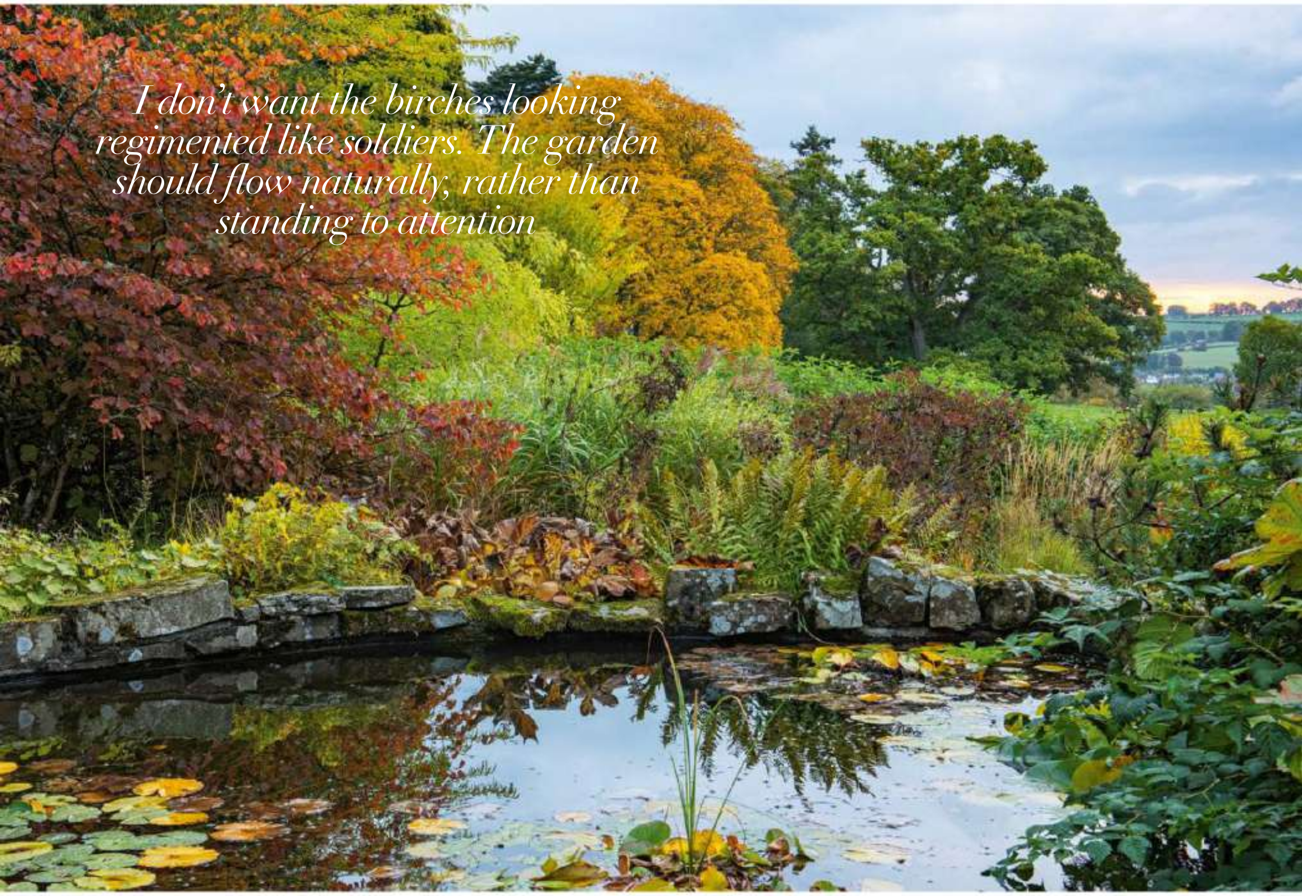
> *"Our trees have always been regularly pruned. It's essential to let in light and encourage smaller rarities to grow beneath"*

autumn. It is one of many acers that, grouped as clumps and interspersed with magnolia, sorbus and birches, was planted near the entrance. "We've planted the trees pretty close together – some might say too close – but we thought more would die. And, looking at the arboretum today, I'm totally unrepentant," says Lawrence. Among the rarest and most pleasing are the fruiting mountain ash, *Sorbus henryi* 'Emei Shan', and *Betula utilis* subsp. *albosinensis* 'Bowling Green', a Chinese red birch with honey-coloured peeling bark. "It was a graft from a tree originally grown from seed collected by Ernest Wilson," Lawrence notes.

Many trees are pruned in late summer to lift the canopy. "Some people think trees should be left *au naturel*, but our trees have always been regularly pruned," says Lawrence. "It's essential to let in light and encourage smaller rarities to grow beneath, but you must be careful not to affect the way in which trees naturally blend together." There is a mixture of broad-leaved trees and conifers, which is unusual, creating strong contrasts of foliage texture.

No new tree is introduced without considerable forethought, not only to ensure the best position for it to flourish – many have been introduced from wild seed – but also with an eye to the future. "First we consider what is known about each specimen: the provenance and information from the expedition is significant," points out Elizabeth. "Then we can work out the best place in the garden, taking into

Above The gravel path to the summerhouse is edged with sedum and Japanese anemones. **Right** Golden-orange leaves of *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum' contrast with a huge *Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula'.



> *I don't want the birches looking regimented like soldiers. The garden should flow naturally, rather than standing to attention*

Above A purple-leaved witch hazel stands next to the pond; in the distance, an old oak. **Left** Purple flowers of *Liriope muscari*. **Far left** Head gardener Stephen Lloyd with his one of his favourite plants, rare *Neoshirakia japonica*, which he grew from seed.

account its ultimate size and shape. It usually takes quite a time!"

Even the most particular of plants have thrived on the neutral shale, in a temperate climate with cool summers and warm winters, sheltered from north and westerly winds by Hergest Ridge and mature woodland. "The conditions are ideal for growing an extraordinary range of plants," Elizabeth observes. To the south of the estate meanders the River Arrow, and nearby is a fortified manor house dating from 1267 that is allegedly haunted by a great black hound, believed to have inspired Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Head gardener Stephen Lloyd has continued the tradition of cultivating rare species from around the world. "I left school on a Friday, started working here on the following Monday and have now been here for 40 years," says Stephen. He has received seeds collected in various far-flung places by contemporary plant hunters such as Roy Lancaster, Chris Chadwell and Bleddyn and Sue Wynn-Jones. "It's alright for me in my little potting shed, propagating away, but then you look at the seed packet, and it says: 'China, 2,000 feet up', and you realise that whoever collected this seed was probably hanging off the side of a remote mountain!"

Stephen's challenges lie in cultivating plants that are more at home in the world's remoter places, but his meticulous records and hands-on approach has assured many successes, especially in adding to the National Collections of Birches, Zelkovas and Maples. "So much of horticulture nowadays is commercial, but here I can be very personal, continually learning from the latest arrivals," he explains. A particular favourite is the rare *Neoshirakia japonica* that he grew from seed in the 1980s: today he is able to shelter beneath its crimson canopy. "I have little idea how a computer works," he admits cheerfully, "but then all I need to be happy is my potting shed, plants and the gardens."

Throughout the arboretum there are small glades of maples or birches, and one of Stephen's favourites is *Betula utilis* subsp. *albosinensis*, a beautiful birch with peeling bark and an elegant trunk. "I like to plant birches in groups – they show themselves off best in a glade," he adds. Nor are they pruned. "I don't want them looking regimented like soldiers: the garden should flow naturally, rather than standing to attention." In one glade stands *Betula* 'Hergest', a lovely mature specimen with an upright bronze trunk that originated from a chance seedling.

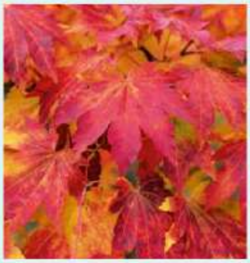
With its blend of glades – even in the parkland, there are spinneys of mature limes, chestnut, acers, beeches, oaks and ash – and single specimens, the arboretum flows comfortably from one area to the next, and it is easy to overlook the many rarities that flourish in between, such as a wonderful *Eucryphia* x *intermedia* 'Rostrevor' smothered in delicate white flowers, and *Lindera obtusiloba*, a "bonny small tree" with glossy leaves and red berries, which took ten years to propagate.

Maturing plants soon become old friends, especially in the 35-year-old Maple Grove where there are more introductions from the wild than anywhere else in the garden. "You can't help but develop a bond with the plants you grow, especially when they're difficult," says Stephen. The Maple Grove is at the bottom of the hill, and the planting has gradually spread upwards. The most recent plantings include berried plants such as stewartia, cotoneaster, photinia and sorbus, set against the view of the Herefordshire plain and Malvern Hills.

The trees create a sense of permanence throughout the garden, sometimes being the centre of attention,

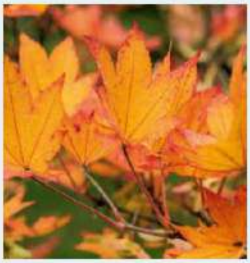
Seasonal FIREWORKS

A selection of Hergest Croft's choice maples, ideal for providing fine autumn colour



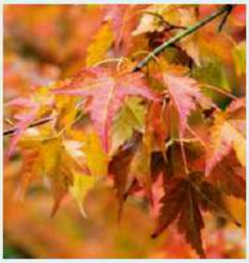
ACER PSEUDOSIEBOLDIANUM

The false Siebold's maple bears sharply toothed, lobed leaves that take on fiery hues.



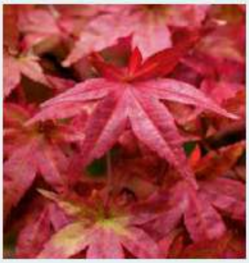
ACER SIEBOLDIANUM

Siebold's maple has velvety mid-green foliage that turns gold, pink and then crimson.



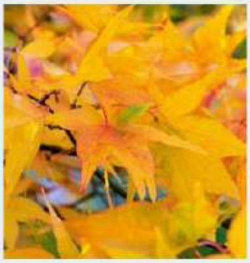
ACER MICRANTHUM

The small-leaved maple has green foliage that turns orange, gold and red, with interesting bark as it ages.



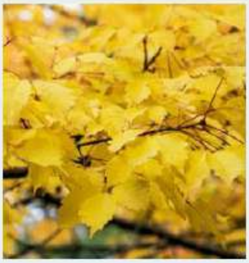
ACER PALMATUM 'GINKO-SAN'

A small Japanese maple that offers bright pink foliage in spring and autumn.



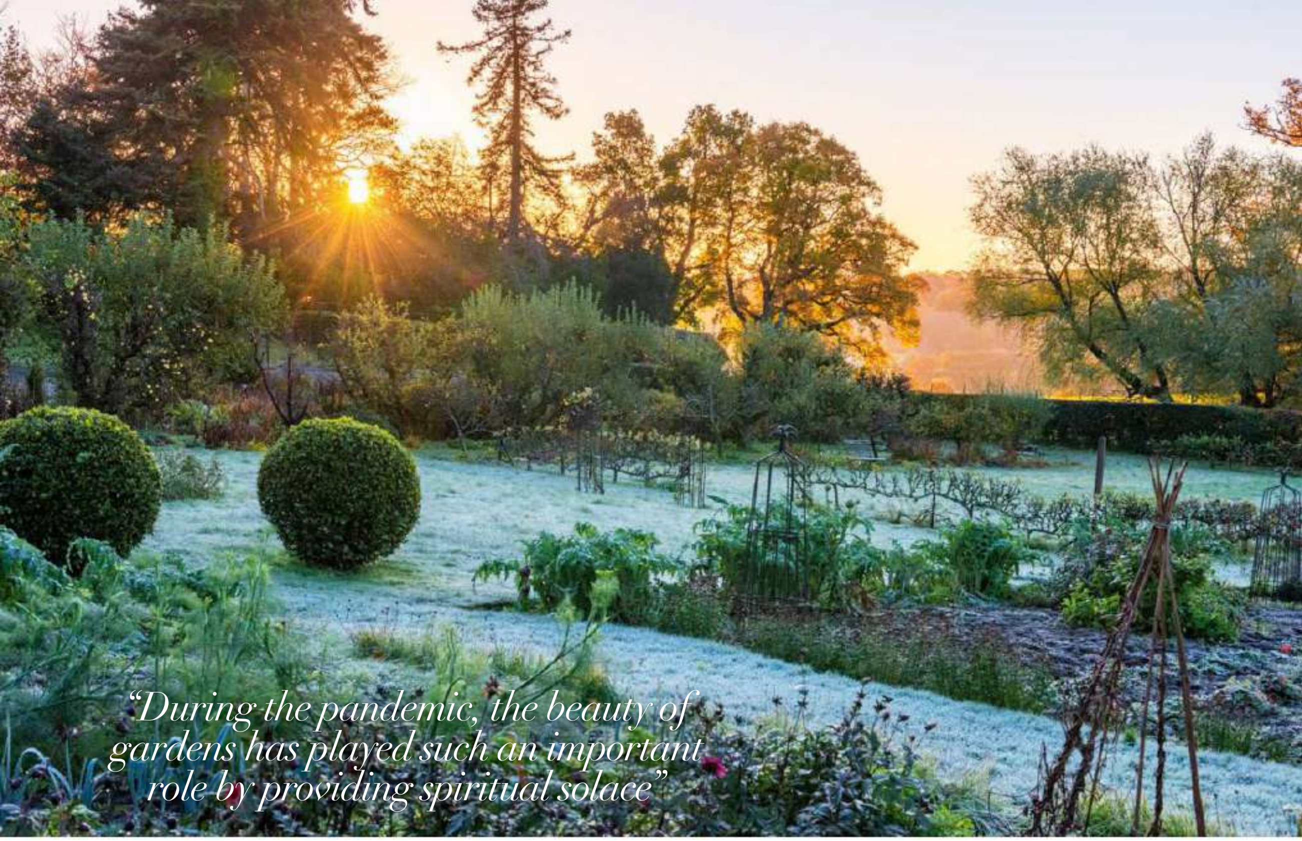
ACER PALMATUM VAR. *MATSUMURAE*

This Japanese maple has green foliage that turns to lovely shades of gold.



ACER CISSIFOLIUM

The ivy-leaved maple has small, dark green, serrated-edged leaves that take on red and gold hues in autumn.



“During the pandemic, the beauty of gardens has played such an important role by providing spiritual solace”

and at others providing a backdrop to roses, herbaceous borders, a formal parterre, rockery and Azalea Garden where, come spring, the blue cedar avenue is enlivened by a spectacular display of daffodils followed by azaleas. Most recently, Lawrence and Elizabeth have restored a traditional kitchen garden, including an apple avenue of gnarled old trees that was probably planted around 1900 by Lawrence’s great-grandmother.

Overseeing the gardens’ development from one century into the next, the couple have ensured real cohesion by maintaining the continuity of new introductions, mostly from eastern Asia, and from China in particular. “We have kept to the style of planting, but the palette has considerably expanded,” they note.

As a former president of the RHS, Elizabeth is particularly keen to inspire a new generation of gardeners. “I’d like to promote the role of gardening as widely as possible, from prisons where it reduces violence, to communities in which it brings people together,” she says. “And, of course, during the pandemic, the beauty of gardens has played such an important role by providing spiritual solace.” ■

Hergest Croft Gardens, Ridgebourne Road, Kington, Herefordshire HR5 3EG. Open until 31 October 2021, 11.30am to 5pm. *hergest.co.uk*

Above The frost-dusted kitchen garden features vegetable beds and step-over apples.
Right An abundant crop of eating apples fills a wooden trug.
Below A magnificent and stately specimen of *Acer* ‘Sango-kaku’, the coral-bark maple.

'Pair of Labradors' by Tanya Russell MRBS

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Fine ARTS

Thanks to Giles Coode-Adams' horticultural expertise and his wife Sonia's painterly eye, a garden of exquisite form and rare botanical treasures has been developed over 40 years at 16th-century Feeringbury Manor in Essex

WORDS **WIDGET FINN** PHOTOGRAPHS **ANNA OMIOTEK-TOTT**

This image A curving path leads around the pond, past beds of lush ferns and primulas. **Opposite** Yew hedges intriguingly screen the garden's rooms.

When Sonia and Giles Coode-Adams moved to 15th-century Feeringbury Manor in 1978, the garden, according to Sonia, was a jungle: "There was nothing but brambles and rubbish and a rose bed at the top of the garden full of ground elder." Undaunted, they set about creating a garden for all seasons, with jewel-like plantings of bulbs in spring, bold herbaceous summer beds and an arboretum that comes into its own in autumn.

"Perhaps we should have worked out our ideas on paper and measured it all up at the start," suggests Sonia, a former garden designer. "But while we were weeding a bed one day we thought that maybe a hedge would look nice here, and that's how the garden grew – organically."

The ten-acre site is mainly south facing and slopes down to the River Blackwater with views of fields beyond. Two ponds at different levels are connected by a stream that flows over a Victorian water wheel and then into the river. The Coode-Adams aimed to create strong structures with yew and box hedges and the occasional wall dividing it all into separate rooms. The main part of the garden has a semi-circular border backed by a mature hedge. "The border flourishes," explains Giles, "because when we planted it I sunk in a two-and-a-half-foot barrier of corrugated iron to prevent the yew roots from invading the bed. I was younger and stronger then!"

Above left The tranquil pond is surrounded by ferns and irises, thriving in its damp margins. **Top right** A stretch of lilac and mauve asters fill this autumnal border with colourful flowers. **Above** Sonia and Giles Coode-Adams. **Opposite** A pink waterlily dahlia; try 'Brackenridge Ballerina' for similar.

The couple are united in the effect they seek from the garden. "We like to mass plants together," says Giles, "so that you have to look closely to discover the surprises." They also have a practical division of interests – Sonia is mainly in charge of the herbaceous areas, while Giles looks after "the woody bits". His modesty belies his expertise as a member of the International Dendrology Society, and a fellow of the Linnean Society. He is also a former president of the Royal Horticultural Society and used to lead the Foundation at Kew Gardens.

Giles's official duties involved visits to many gardens that provided ideas and inspiration, as well as opportunities to acquire a wide range of plants. "But, on the whole, it's the familiar favourites that we love," says Sonia. "In autumn we have lots of Michaelmas daisies, dahlias, and salvias that keep on going till the frosts." Michaelmas daisies are coming back into fashion again now, but Sonia's have been established for many years. "We found *Aster novae-angliae* (now *Symphyotrichum*) are resistant to mildew. They're very promiscuous and self-seed all over the place, so the varieties have got completely mixed up, but our favourites include 'Andenken an Alma Pötschke' and 'Harrington's Pink'. The overall effect is a beautiful soft mauve."

Dahlias provide a burst of colour, the favourites being scarlet 'Apache', mauve 'Blue Boy' and orange 'Ludwig Helfert'. Sonia's advice for the autumn garden is to introduce some structure. "We've

The star of the autumn show at Feeringbury Manor is undoubtedly the arboretum: an acre of fizzing colour from berries and foliage

placed box balls on the corner of the large border, and planted shrubs to provide a background. Myrtle flowers well into autumn, and *Heptacodium miconioides* is brilliant, though not well known. It looks very exotic but is hardy, with fragrant white flowers from the end of September with a calyx that turns red-orange." She warns that it can grow to 12 feet, but is easily pruned to fit a smallish garden.

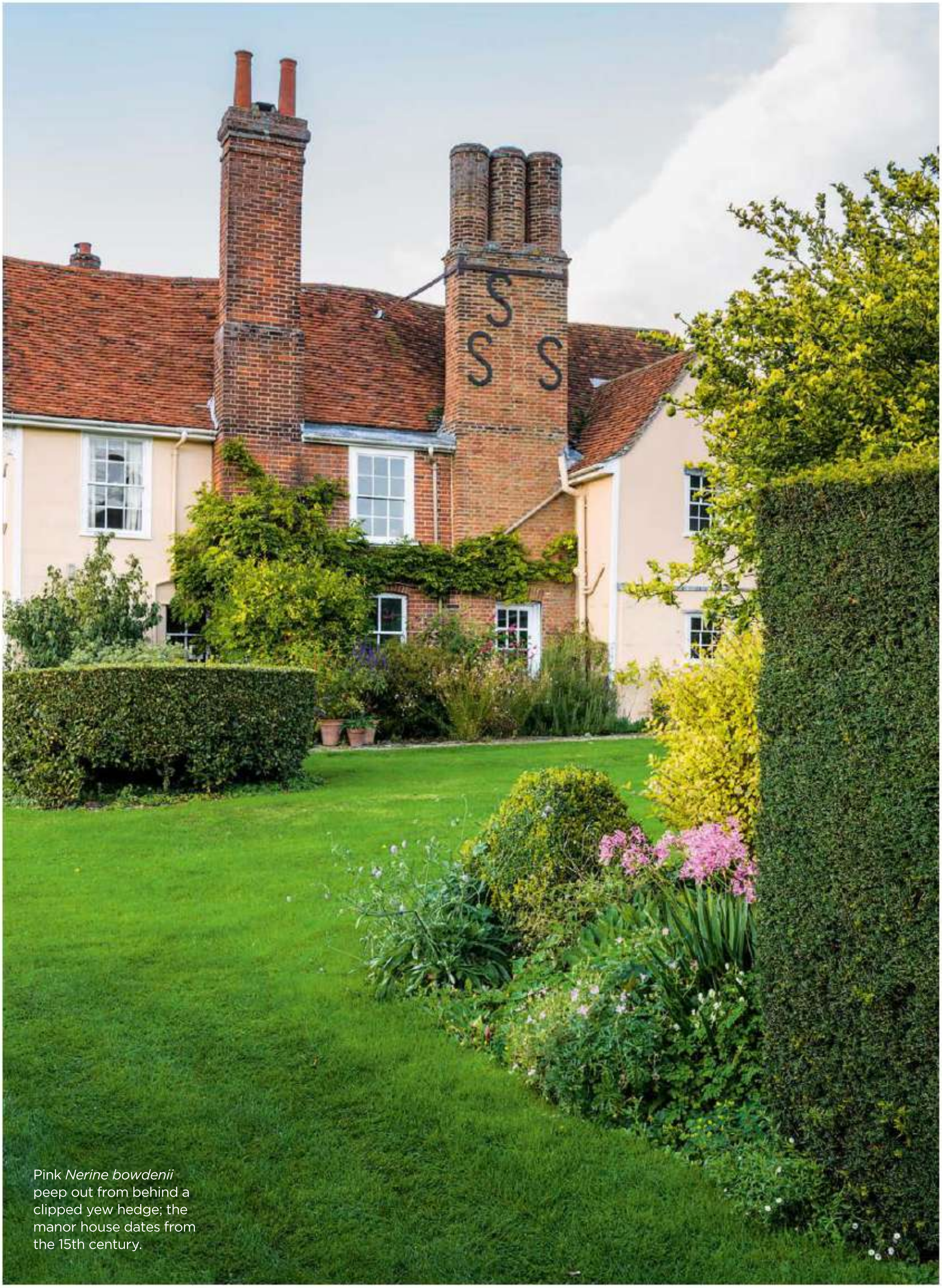
Strobilanthes, a curious, hairy-leaved perennial with blue flowers, contrasts well with the star of the herbaceous border: pale yellow daisy-flowered *Coreopsis verticillata*, which spreads everywhere and was a favourite of Christopher Lloyd. Sonia was a close friend of the eminent plantsman, and many of her herbaceous plants are from Great Dixter where she was a frequent visitor when he was alive.

With two such knowledgeable gardeners there are bound to be unusual treasures among the familiar plants. Giles recommends hardy orange tree relative *Poncirus trifoliata*: "It's not grown widely, but it should be better known for autumn interest as well as spring. It has white flowers in March, then very decorative small oranges – which aren't edible – in October. A warning: it's very prickly and quite slow growing, but if it doesn't work take it out!"

Roses abound and include *Rosa mutabilis*, 'Cecile Brunner' and hybrid musk roses, which go on blooming into the autumn. Climbers that scramble into shrubs and trees are popular with the Coode-Adams, and include *Clematis montana* which scales a yew here. *Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*, meanwhile, produces ornamental, bright blue, green and purple berries all at once in autumn and is a rare trophy that Giles grew from seed brought back from the Japanese island of Hokkaido.

Shrubs light up the garden, including *Cotinus* 'Grace' the vivid scarlet smoke bush, and a range of euonymus, including *Euonymus alatus* and 'Red Cascade'. But the star of the autumn show at Feeringbury Manor is undoubtedly the arboretum: an acre of fizzing colour from berries and foliage.

Top Persicaria, purple asters and miscanthus supply autumnal interest to this mixed border. **Left** Russet apples ripen on one of the Coode-Adams' apple trees. **Far left** A froth of pale mauve aster flowers; *Symphyotrichum ericoides* 'Rosy Veil' will give a similar effect.



Pink *Nerine bowdenii* peep out from behind a clipped yew hedge; the manor house dates from the 15th century.

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Giles grew many of these trees from seed collected on his plant-hunting expeditions over the past 20 years. Euonymus is his special interest, although he also has rare specimens from other genera. *Acer griseum*, the paperbark maple, provides dramatic orange colour and dark stems. Feeringbury's specimen received the ultimate accolade from Roy Lancaster who said that it was the best example he'd ever seen. Giles's recommendations for less ambitious trees for autumn colour in a small garden include *Sorbus commixta*, *Malus* x *robusta* 'Sentinel' and *Acer rubrum*.

The Coode-Adams have planted strongly perfumed flowers at the entrance to the main part of the garden. During the summer months *Trachelospermum jasminoides* and *T. asiatica*, buddleja and honeysuckles greet you, and in autumn and winter the fragrance of sarcococca and *Lonicera purpusii* fills the air. Throughout the garden, complementing the strong lines of hedge and wall, are a series of dramatic galvanised steel sculptures by Sonia and Giles's son Ben. His bold gate leading from the garden to the compost heap has a religious theme. A domed arch marks the central point of two vistas, and a garden seat invites visitors to pause and contemplate the peaceful views.

Artistic talent runs in the family. Sonia took up painting again inspired by a chance visit to an art supply shop in Paris, and she recently held an exhibition of 45 pictures of the garden, which she

Top Pastel-coloured asters are a beautiful complement to the trees' golden autumnal foliage. **Above** Pale yellow *Coreopsis verticillata* with purple *Strobilanthes wallichii* on the right, both backed by a large stand of bamboo.

Complementing the strong lines of hedge and wall, are a series of dramatic galvanised steel sculptures by Sonia and Giles's son Ben

Sonia claims she continually finds subjects in the garden to paint, while Giles says "I look at the garden differently as a result of Sonia's paintings"

had painted during lockdown. These beautiful surroundings, created over 40 years, are a constant source of artistic inspiration to the couple – she claims that she continually finds subjects in the garden to paint, while Giles comments, "I look at the garden differently as a result of Sonia's paintings."

When Giles became president of the RHS in 2009 his ambition was "to make the RHS more accessible to everyone". True to this aim, he and Sonia enjoy sharing the beauty and peace of their lovely garden with others by opening it throughout the summer in aid of the National Garden Scheme. ■

Feeringbury Manor, Coggeshall Road, Feering, Essex CO5 9RB. Opens in 2022 in aid of the National Garden Scheme on Thursdays and Fridays only, 31 March to 29 July. Closed August. Reopens 1 September to 14 October. The garden also welcomes groups, by arrangement, from January to December. Tel: 01376 561946; *ngs.org.uk*

Top Laden with its glossy scarlet fruit, *Malus* 'Sentinel' makes a bountiful focal point. **Above** The arch was made by Giles and Sonia's son Ben. **Left** Orange berries emerge from magenta cases on *Euonymus* 'Red Cascade'.

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A layered tapestry of shrubs and trees chosen for their autumn interest ensure a fascinating mix of texture and colour at this time of year.

Living in the MOMENT

While the Kentish downland garden of Eagleswood has been planted with many special trees that will not reach maturity for many years, owners Mike and Edith Darvill make the most of tending this peaceful space in the here and now

WORDS **VIVIENNE HAMBLY** PHOTOGRAPHS **MMGI/BENNET SMITH**

Top Multicoloured autumn leaves of *Nyssa sylvatica* alongside the gleaming bark of *Prunus serrula*, with *Erica carnea* 'Pink Spangles' below. **Above** *Acer palmatum* Dissectum Group gives this stone container a vibrant backdrop. **Right** Hydrangea flowers always fade gracefully.

It is Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram who inspired much of Mike Darvill's approach to gardening at Eagleswood, high on the Kent Downs. Cherry, a plant collector born in 1880 and renowned for his contribution to the survival of Japanese cherry species in their home country, was an avid gardener until his death in 1981. One day, a mutual friend of Cherry and Mike visited the plant collector at his home and found the elderly man sowing rhododendron seed, knowing it was unlikely he would live to see the specimens mature.

"He took this view that you should forget your age and just do all the things you enjoy doing because they may very well become successful, and then you'll be glad you did them," explains Mike, now 83. "I thought that was a correct idea to follow."

Follow, Mike and his wife Edith did. In autumn, Eagleswood is a carnival of colour and a testament to their passion for gardening – trees and shrubs in particular. "We came here in 1987, just before the Great Storm," Mike recalls. "We'd moved from the Mendips and came to Eagleswood because we loved the situation – and because it came with three acres of land for us to keep our flock of Jacob sheep."

The gardens around the house had been managed in a fairly conventional way. There were lawns and herbaceous borders, with the remaining land

Drooping clusters of scarlet berries on a lovely specimen of *Sorbus vilmorinii* hang above a stone bird bath.

Top *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Yakushima Dwarf', euonymus and hollies 'Silver Queen' and 'Madame Briot'. **Above** Cerise *Sorbus hupehensis* berries.

consisting of recently sown pasture. "The first thing we did was to put up fences and divide it into three paddocks," says Mike.

The year 2000 arrived at the time of Mike's retirement. Edith suggested "doing something for the Millennium, like planting a woodland," he recalls. The couple turned the first paddock over to the project, reducing the size of their flock and moving the sheep to a paddock further out. Since there were already beech and oak trees in the first paddock, Mike wanted to grow "more interesting stuff" and specimen plants. "There wasn't any splendid plan, so we inevitably made some mistakes. Edith got a sheet of paper and sketched out large, winding paths around biggish island beds. We laid those out with a hosepipe and bits of rope to work out the shape."

It is quite thrilling, if somewhat nerve-wracking, to make the first marks of a new garden on the ground, let alone to begin planting it – and especially if you have in mind trees that could live for a century. Or much longer, in the case of one redwood the couple planted, which, after 20 years already has a girth of 2 foot 6 inches and is "very tall". This is planting for a long game: "I'm sure someone in the future is going to come along and say: 'What fool planted this?'" Mike quips.

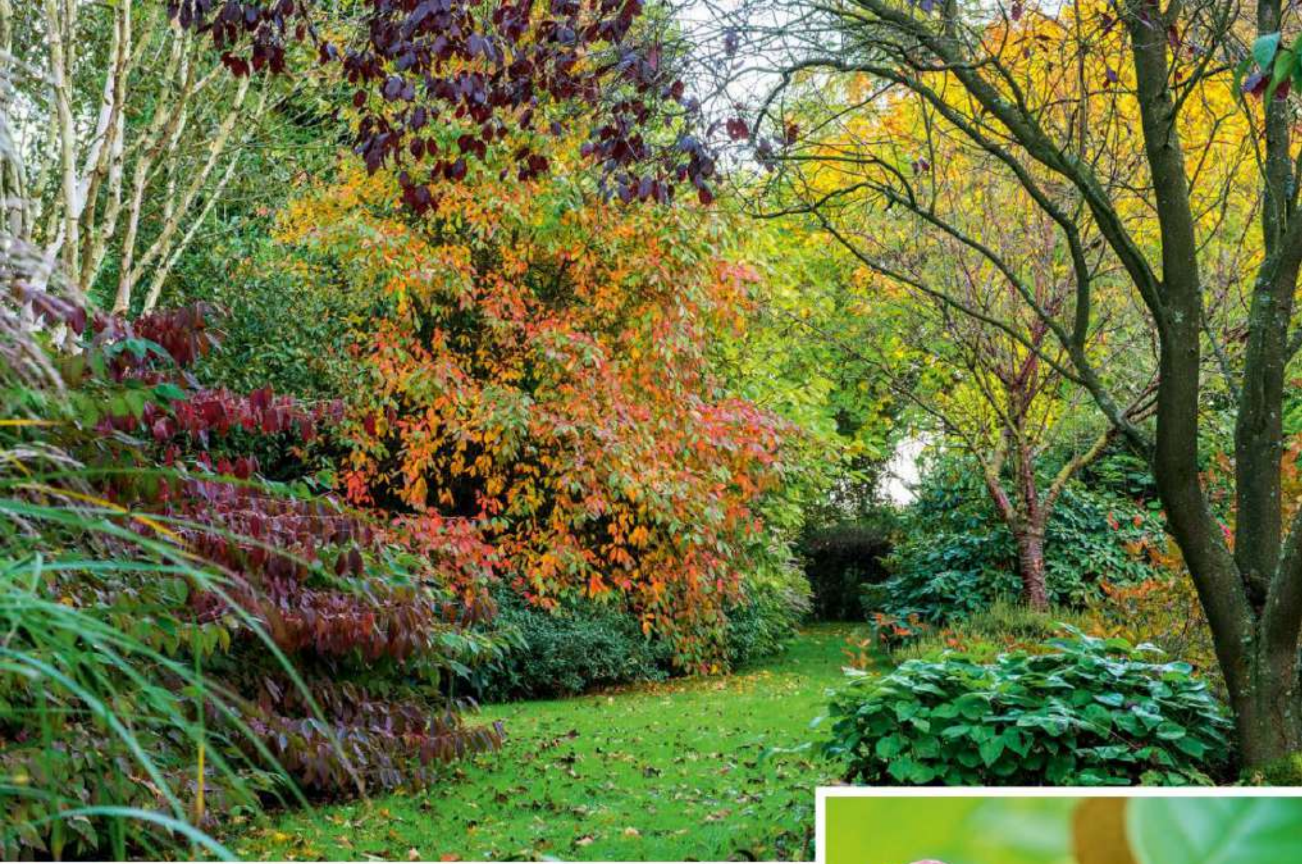
> *"I'm crazy about trees and shrubs. It's the structure you get in the third dimension that is so attractive"*

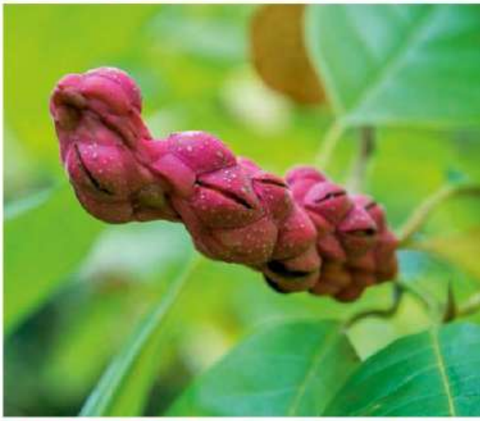
The Darvills have had a decent site to work with. Although they needed to break the biting east wind with leylandii hedging in certain parts, the property is about 600ft above sea level, with flinty, slightly acidic soil above a clay bed. The clay is "pretty hideous in winter", but has proved very good for the trees, the roots of which benefit from the water it holds. "Once you get trees established and their roots go down into the clay, they grow at a very fast rate," Mike observes.

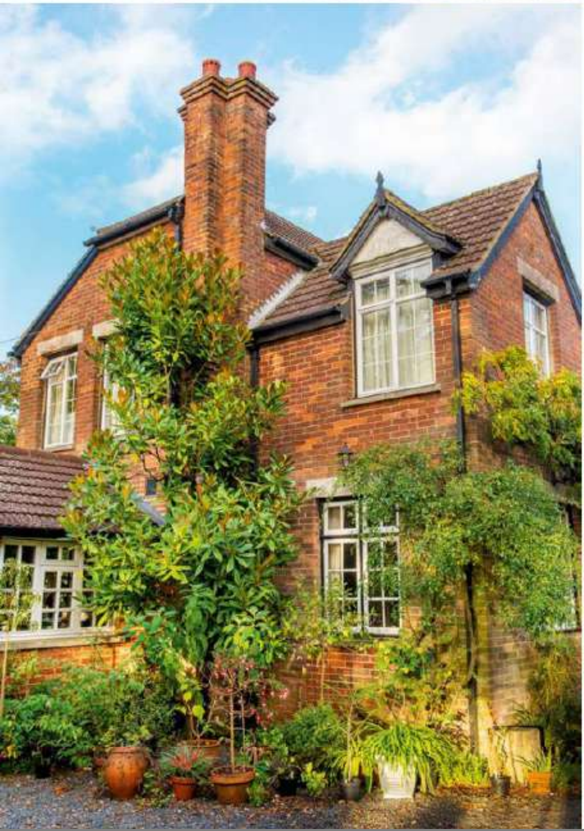
The redwood may attract attention for its stature but, at this time of year, many other subjects also have their hour. *Nyssa sylvatica* turns shades of carmine and cochineal, and there is *Parrotia persica*, several acer and salix species, and *Quercus coccinea*, the scarlet oak, which parade their rich colour through the garden from late summer into December. There is also *Cornus kousa* along with classic *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire', which Mike pollards for bright colour later in the season. Groundcover is provided by periwinkles and hardy geraniums, while paths are either mown or laid with woodchip from the garden.

Having filled the first paddock, Mike and Edith have now moved onto the second, which is about an acre and a half in size. This one has the mood of an arboretum, with specimen trees growing in the grass, and a stand of naturally occurring oaks and beeches at the bottom of the plot. Beneath these, Mike and Edith experiment with shade-loving plants such as hellebores and trilliums. "I do like a range of plants, and we dabble in all of them, but I'm crazy about trees and shrubs," says Mike. "It's the structure you get in the third dimension that is so attractive. There's the colour, but there is also the skeletal shape of the tree in winter that I just love."

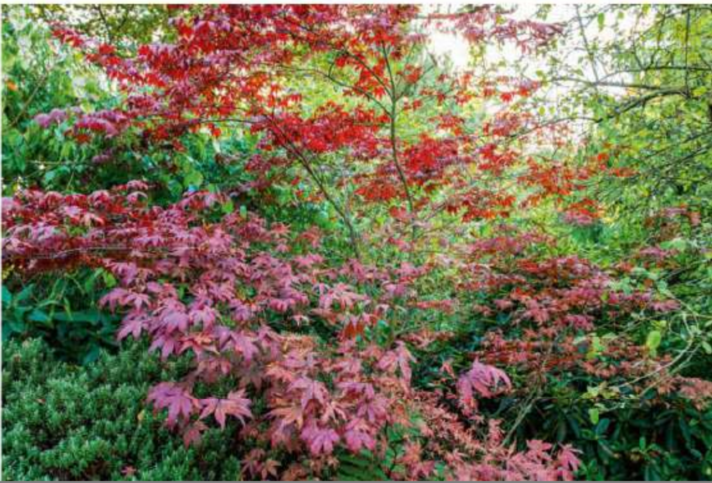
Yet it's not enough for Mike simply to grow trees in this garden. In a polytunnel, tucked away, he regularly propagates favoured species. A *Franklinia alatamaha* is a case in point. Extinct in its native US state of Georgia since the 18th century, this tree is mostly now confined to arboreta, with a couple of







Above Dark maroon leaves of *Viburnum plicatum* 'Mariesii' make a pleasing contrast with fiery *Nyssa sylvatica*. **Right** A seedhead of *Magnolia campbellii* 'Charles Raffill'. **Below** *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood' can always be relied on to provide rich autumn colour. **Left** A glossy-leaved magnolia grows in the shelter of the house.



“We are so lucky. It’s peaceful and quiet, and there is a wonderful feeling of being at one with nature”

specimens at RHS Wisley. Although it’s easy to raise from seed, it does need some encouragement to open its large, off-white, cup-shaped blooms at this time of year. “This tree is currently my number one,” says Mike. “Mine has some buds, but I’m not sure if they’re going to open. The leaves do have spectacular autumn colour though.” The polytunnel also houses overwintering abutilons, brugmansias and tree ferns that Mike doesn’t dare leave out in winter.

Mike also grows hydrangeas, including *Hydrangea serrata* ‘Tiara’ – a small, mauve-blue lacecap developed by Maurice Foster VMH of White House Farm, in nearby Sevenoaks. Maurice is a stalwart of the RHS Woody Plants committee, and his own garden is filled with notable woody plants. On the soil at Eagleswood, ‘Tiara’ is blue turning to pink, with green leaves that fade to bronze.

All gardens benefit from regular care and this one is no exception. Mike and Edith do all the work themselves, and they don’t stop over the colder months. “Every winter I cut the branches and trim things into shape,” Mike explains. “If you do your maintenance regularly, it’s never such a big job.”

While the work is constant, so, too, is the pleasure the Darvills derive from their garden. “We are so lucky,” says Mike. “There are times when you just watch and listen and let the world go by. It’s peaceful and quiet, and there is a wonderful feeling of being at one with nature.”

The wisdom of Cherry Ingram comes to the fore, too. “You’re never too old to plant a tree because you never know how long you’ve got. You might have another 20 years, and then when you reach the end of 20 years, you might say, ‘I wish I’d sown that seed then’, but it will be too late.” ■

Above left *Enkianthus chinensis* gives a warm glow as its leaves turn. **Above middle** The distinctive upright form and buttery yellow autumn leaves of a young *Ginkgo biloba*. **Above right** *Miscanthus sinensis* ‘Arabesque’.

Eagleswood, Slade Road, Warren Street, Lenham, Maidstone, Kent ME17 2EG. The gardens open for the National Garden Scheme by prior arrangement from April to October. Tel: 01622 858702; *ngs.org.uk*

Trees for Autumn Colour

“We have many trees and shrubs that contribute to the autumn show but the following are the most impressive,” says Mike. “The colour of the leaves lasts until December, then you can keep the colour going with remaining fruit and then with the stems of cornus and salix.”

SEPTEMBER

Parrotia persica
Acer japonica ‘Vitifolium’
Cercidiphyllum japonicum
Hamamelis x *intermedia* ‘Diane’

MID-OCTOBER

Acer palmatum cultivars
Cornus kousa ‘Miss Satomi’
Nyssa sylvatica
Sorbus alnifolia
Enkianthus chinensis
Hamamelis x *intermedia* ‘Pallida’

MID-NOVEMBER

Sorbus sargentiana
Acer davidii
Acer rubrum ‘October Glory’
Quercus palustris
Quercus coccinea

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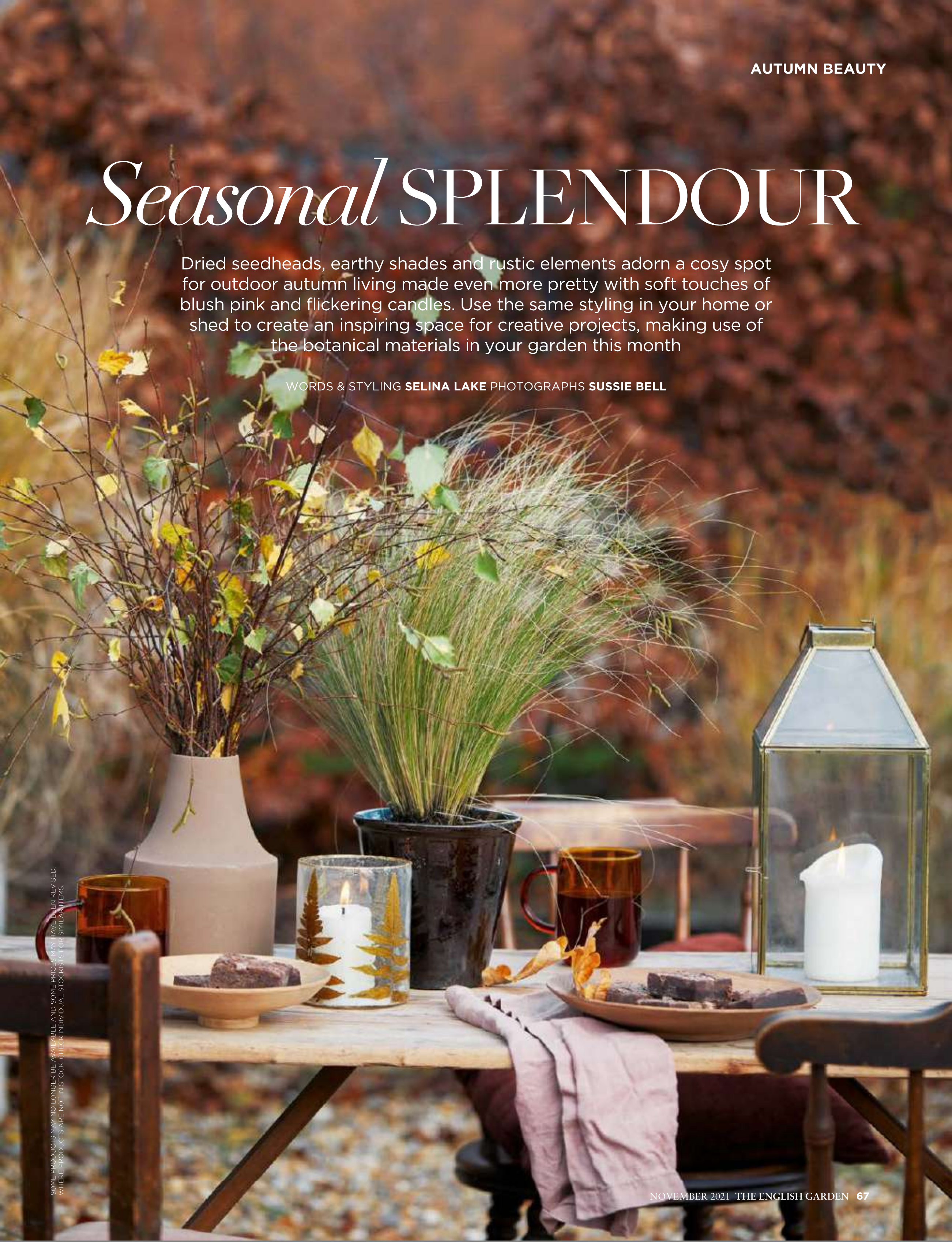
Seasonal SPLENDOUR

Dried seedheads, earthy shades and rustic elements adorn a cosy spot for outdoor autumn living made even more pretty with soft touches of blush pink and flickering candles. Use the same styling in your home or shed to create an inspiring space for creative projects, making use of the botanical materials in your garden this month

WORDS & STYLING **SELINA LAKE** PHOTOGRAPHS **SUSSIE BELL**

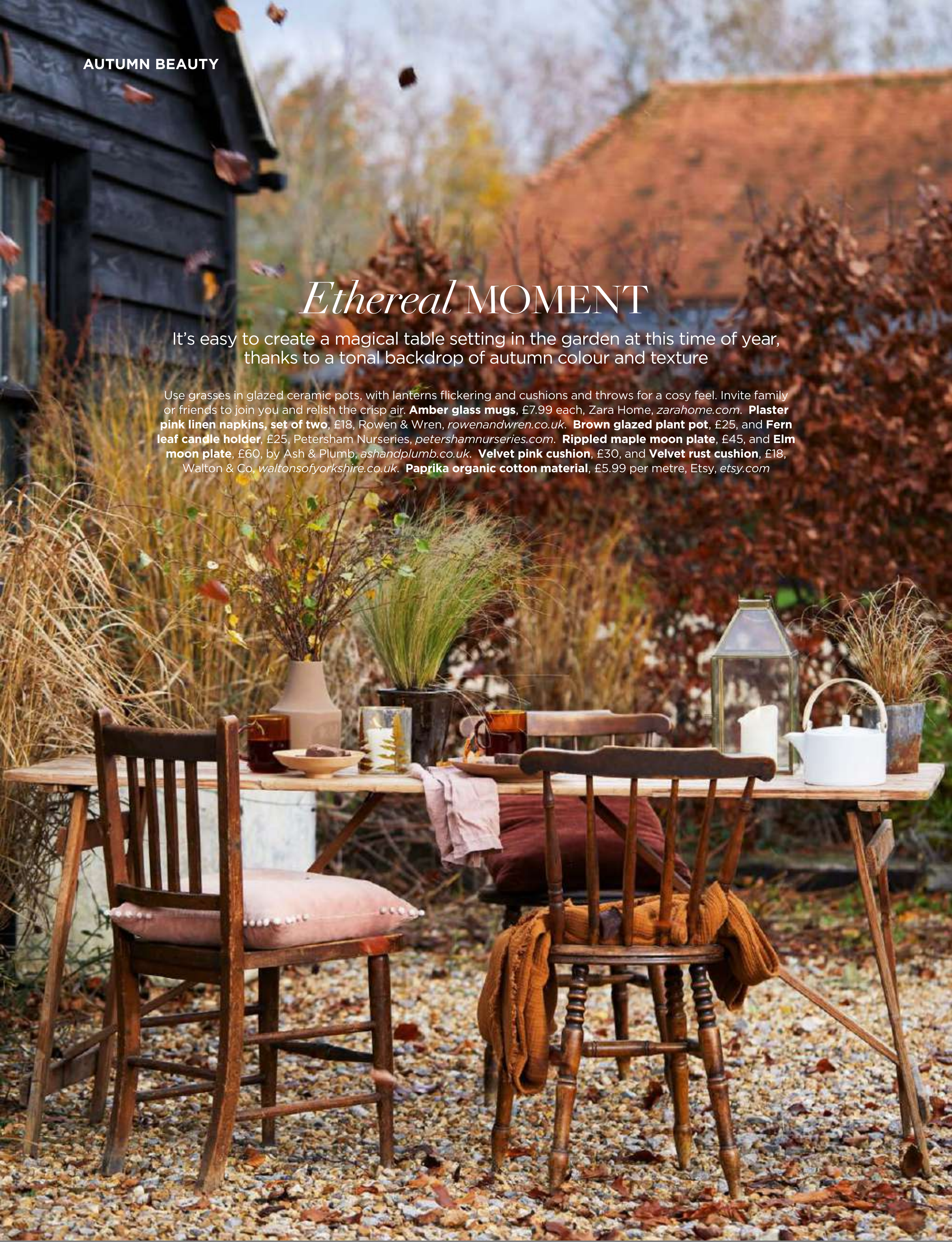


SOME PRODUCTS MAY NO LONGER BE AVAILABLE AND SOME PRICES MAY HAVE BEEN REVISED. WHERE PRODUCTS ARE NOT IN STOCK CHECK INDIVIDUAL STOCKISTS FOR SIMILAR ITEMS.

Ethereal MOMENT

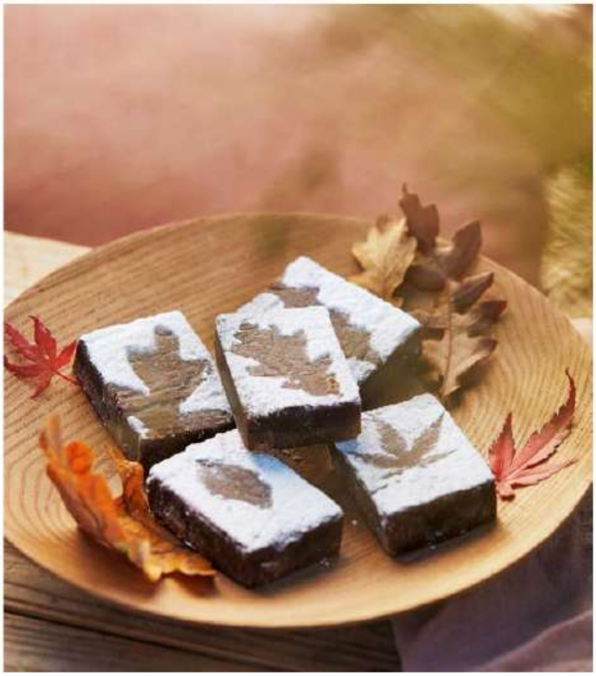
It's easy to create a magical table setting in the garden at this time of year, thanks to a tonal backdrop of autumn colour and texture

Use grasses in glazed ceramic pots, with lanterns flickering and cushions and throws for a cosy feel. Invite family or friends to join you and relish the crisp air. **Amber glass mugs**, £7.99 each, Zara Home, *zarahome.com*. **Plaster pink linen napkins, set of two**, £18, Rowen & Wren, *rowenandwren.co.uk*. **Brown glazed plant pot**, £25, and **Fern leaf candle holder**, £25, Petersham Nurseries, *petershamnurseries.com*. **Rippled maple moon plate**, £45, and **Elm moon plate**, £60, by Ash & Plumb, *ashandplumb.co.uk*. **Velvet pink cushion**, £30, and **Velvet rust cushion**, £18, Walton & Co, *waltonsofyorkshire.co.uk*. **Paprika organic cotton material**, £5.99 per metre, Etsy, *etsy.com*



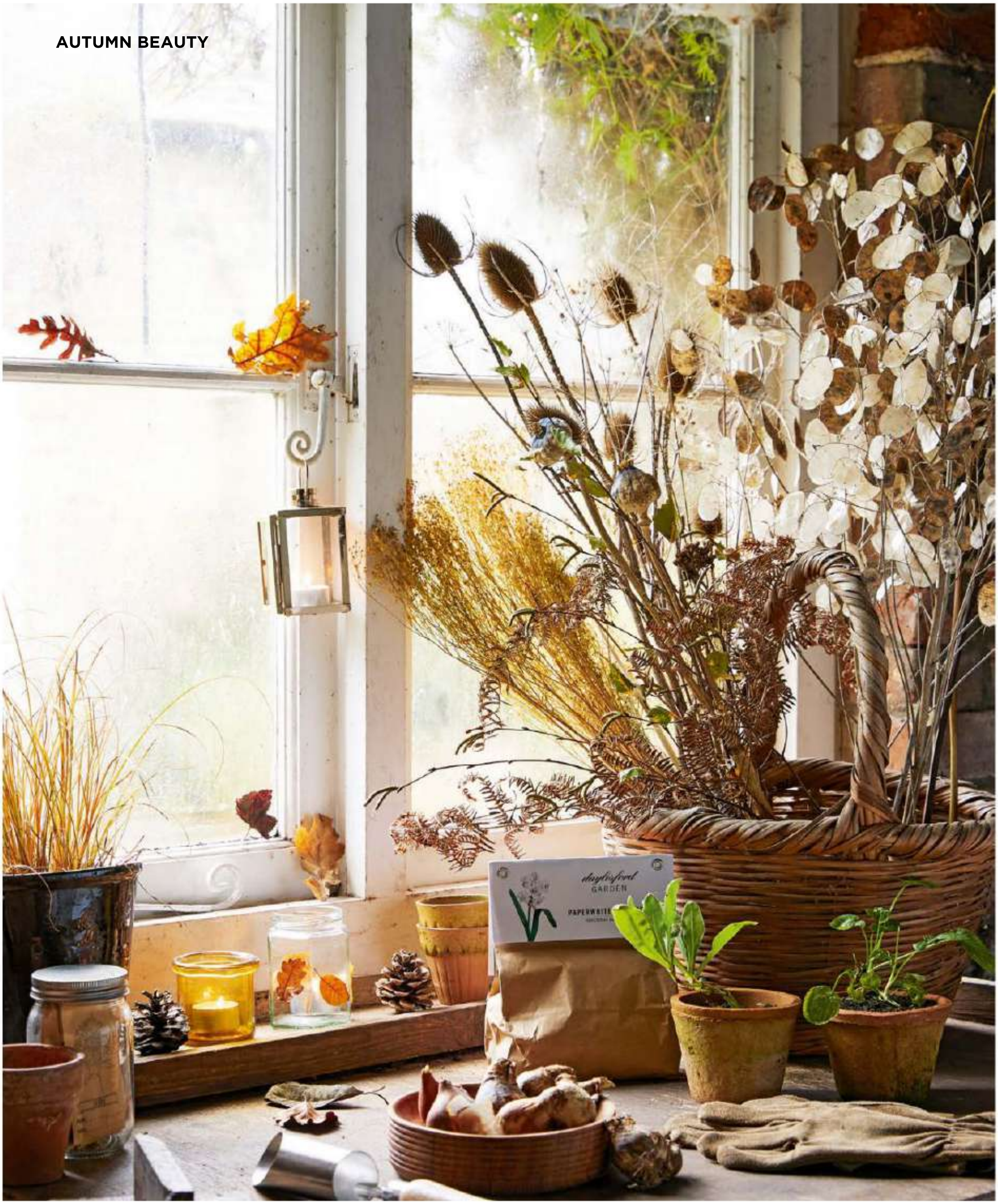
Everything you need to make your table look special can be packed into a crate to take outside, and packed back into it when you're done. **Vintage woven platter**, £22 for set of 4, **1970s mustard mug**, £10, and **1974 Midwinter Wild Oats jug**, £18, all from Etsy, *etsy.com*

A found magnolia-leaf skeleton makes a simple place setting with fallen oak leaves for rich colour. **IST London milk white dinner plate**, £75 for set (with dessert and side plates) Samantha Johnson Design, *samanthajohnsondesign.com*. **Vintage cake plate**, £12, Etsy, *etsy.com*

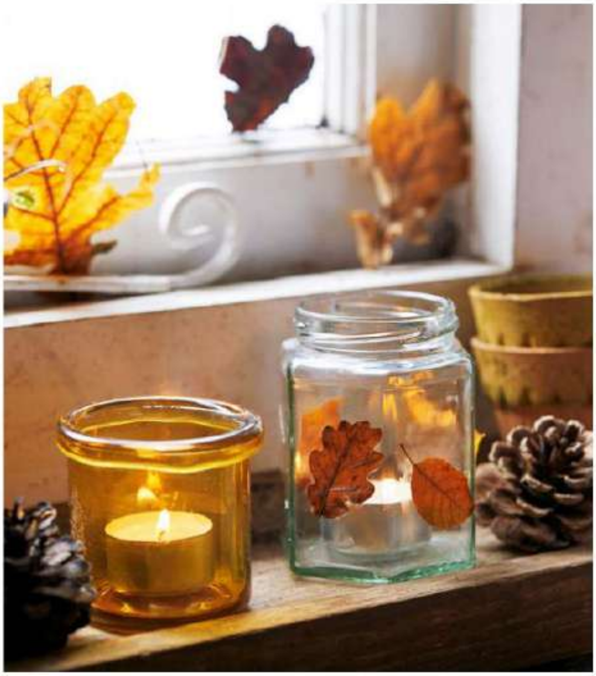


Decorate home-made chocolate brownies with a fallen leaf design. Collect flat, dry leaves in different shapes, place onto each brownie, then dust icing sugar over the surface to create the leaf outline. **Elm moon plate**, £60, by Ash & Plumb, *ashandplumb.co.uk*

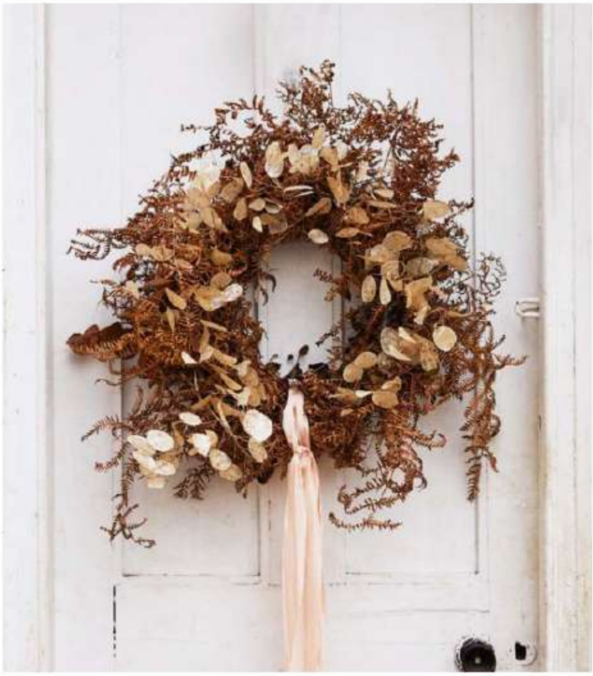
Amber glass mugs and gold-patterned candle holders bring the tonal colour palette from the leaves to the table, and artisan hand-turned wood dishes are the perfect way to serve delicious home-made treats. Accessorise with sprigs of catkins and interesting twigs.



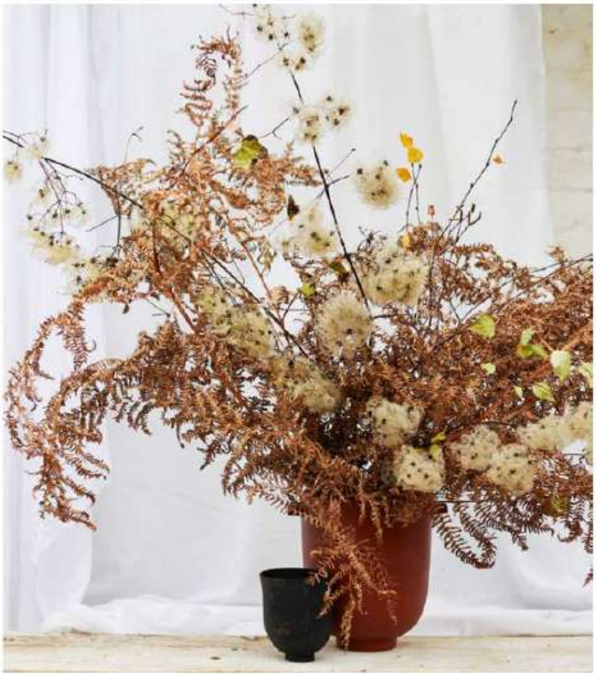
If you're thinking ahead to planting out bulbs and tending seedlings, these tasks will be more enjoyable when working in an inspiring environment. Tidy up your potting bench to achieve this, then restyle it by blurring the boundaries between outside and in: adorn window ledges with seasonal finds, keep a basket of botanical materials to hand for creative projects, and add candles in lanterns for a little glow. **Hand-made bespoke wood turned bowl**, £110, Nafisi Studio, *nafisi.design*. **Paperwhite bulbs**, £7.95, **Suede gloves**, £22, and **Bulb planter**, £16, all Daylesford, *daylesford.com*



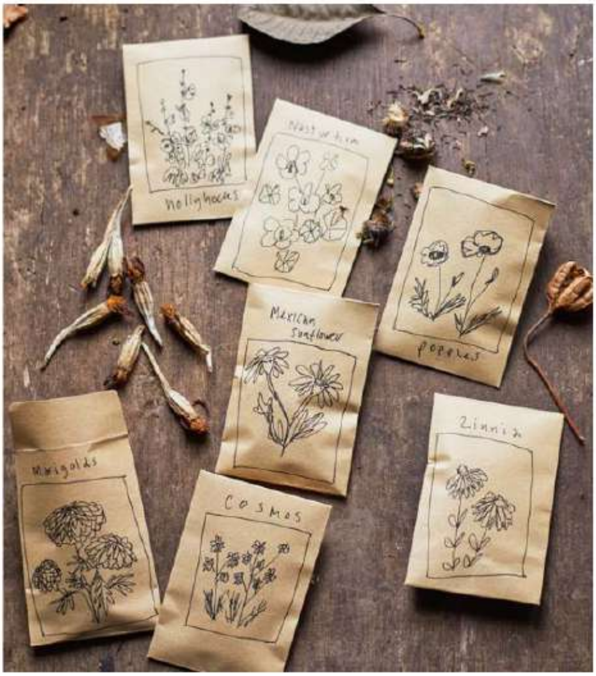
Candlelight will give a cosy feel in the garden or inside your shed as the afternoon light fades. Decorate a recycled glass jar by sticking on pressed autumn leaves with PVA glue, leaving it to dry before adding and lighting a tea light. Never leave a lit candle unattended.



Make a delicate wreath by attaching foraged bracken to a moss wreath base with wire or string. Decorate with the papery seedheads of honesty and add a pretty ribbon. **Nude blush silk ribbon**, £10 for 2m, Cfleursdesign via Etsy, *etsy.com/uk/shop/Cfleursdesign*



For a striking display, arrange dry bracken, silver birch twigs and the fluffy seedheads of old man's beard in a vessel with a length of white muslin behind. **Burned red vase**, £110, Folk Interiors, *folkinteriors.co.uk.* **Ebonised brushed oak vessel**, £90, Ash & Plumb, *ashandplumb.co.uk*



Get creative with simple Kraft paper seed envelopes and a black ink pen, and sketch flowers or plants to remind you what the seeds you have collected will grow into. These will also make sweet gifts for loved ones. Find similar seed envelopes at local stationers.

***Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder'** The biscuity foliage and gorgeous plumed seedheads of this reliable grass look fantastic in tall vases.

Phlomis russeliana Pompon whorls of seedheads work up the stiff stems of Turkish sage in autumn, offering fascinating texture.

***Hydrangea aspera* 'Macrophylla'** The large, bold, lilac flowers of this lace-cap variety are easy to dry and look stunning in arrangements.

Lunaria annua Classic, mirror-like seedcases of garden staple honesty will add elegant silvery highlights to a vase of dried flowers.

GROWING & CUTTING

Perfect plants for autumn arrangements

Harvest seedheads galore from this selection of easy-to-grow annuals

Briza maxima and other annual grasses such as *Hordeum jubatum* and *Panicum* 'Frosted Explosion' have beautiful light-catching flowerheads that dry brilliantly for autumn displays. Sow seed in mid-spring.

***Scabiosa stellata* 'Sternkugel'** bears palest mauve-blue summer flowers that change into papery spherical seedheads by autumn, when they can be picked and used fresh or left to dry.

Nigella, or love-in-a-mist, is a familiar annual with its spidery blue flowers followed by puffed-up seedpods. Ring the changes by trying *Nigella orientalis* 'Transformer', which has yellow blooms.

Opium poppies, varieties of *Papaver somniferum*, are easy to grow and are best sown directly onto the soil where you'd like them to flower. The ruffled blooms are followed by robust, plump seedheads in a pepper-pot shape.

Wild carrot, *Daucus carota,* bears insect-attracting white umbellifer flowers in early summer, but the architectural umbrella-like seedheads that follow are just as attractive.

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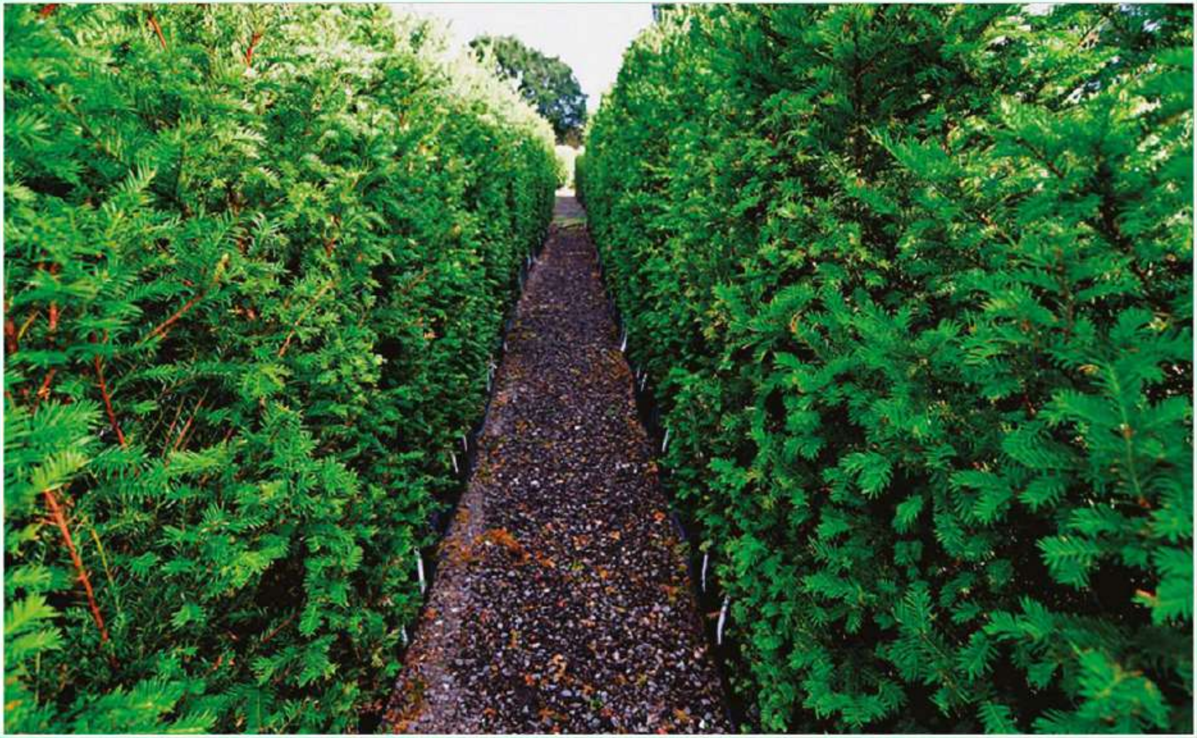

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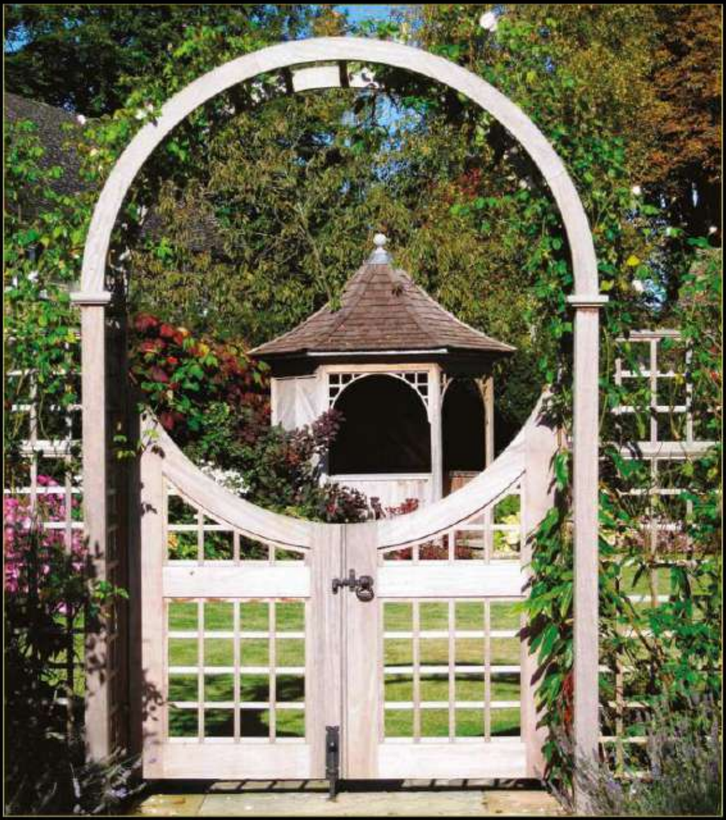

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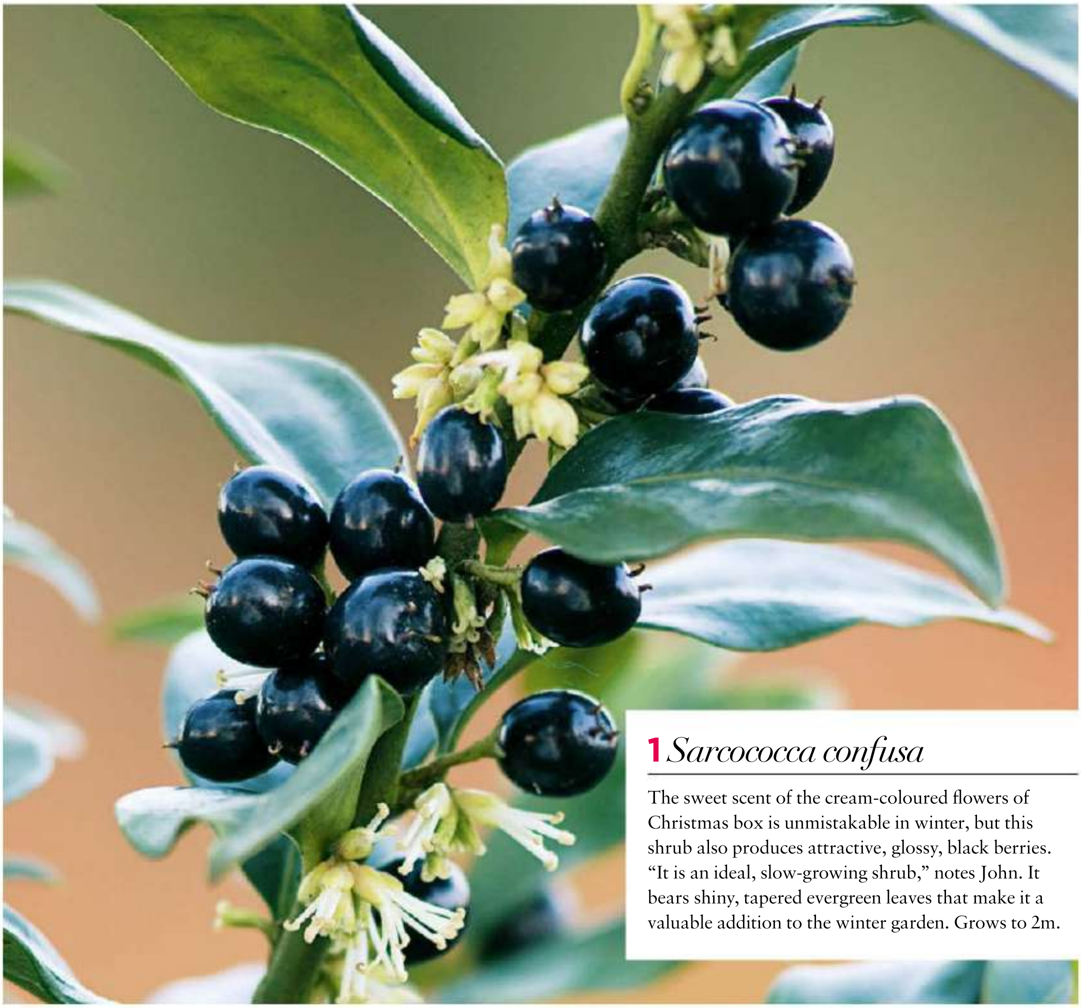
Brilliant Berries

A lot of the autumn and winter colour at the Savill Garden in Windsor comes from berried shrubs. Keeper of the gardens **John Anderson** recommends ten

Set within Windsor Great Park, the Savill Garden covers 35 acres of interconnected spaces. The keeper of the gardens is John Anderson, who, in addition to the Savill Garden, has responsibility for Her Majesty's private garden at Frogmore and the 250-acre Valley Gardens. He is a member of the RHS Woody Plant Committee, and in 2020 was awarded the Veitch Memorial Medal by the RHS for his contributions to the advancement of science and practice of horticulture. At this time of year the Savill Garden is filled with autumn colour, plenty of it coming from shrubs that bear autumn berries. Here John suggests ten good varieties to try.

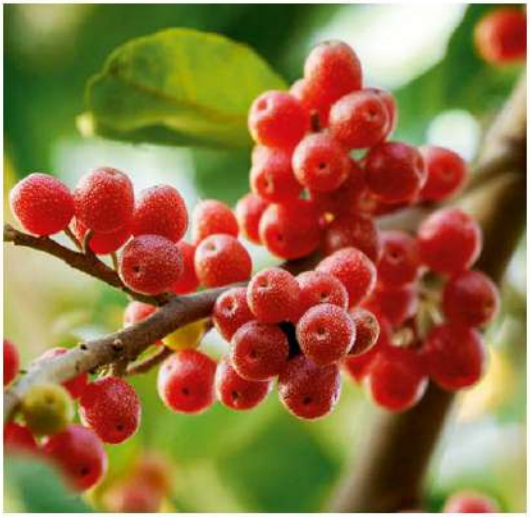
The Savill Garden, Wick Lane, Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey TW20 0UJ. Tel: 01753 860222; ***windsorgreatpark.co.uk***



1 *Sarcococca confusa*

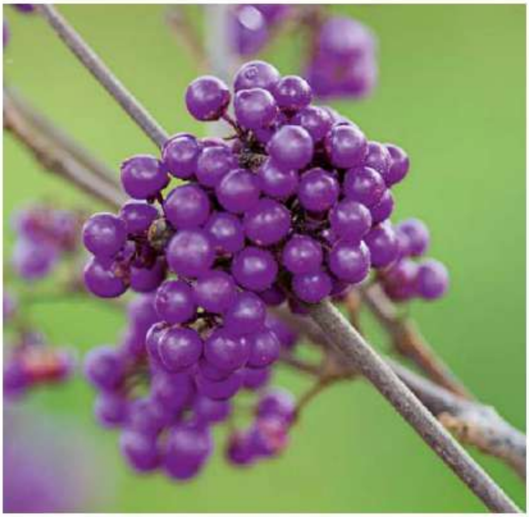
The sweet scent of the cream-coloured flowers of Christmas box is unmistakable in winter, but this shrub also produces attractive, glossy, black berries. "It is an ideal, slow-growing shrub," notes John. It bears shiny, tapered evergreen leaves that make it a valuable addition to the winter garden. Grows to 2m.

WORDS VIVIENNE HAMBLY **IMAGE** GAP/RICHARD BLOOM



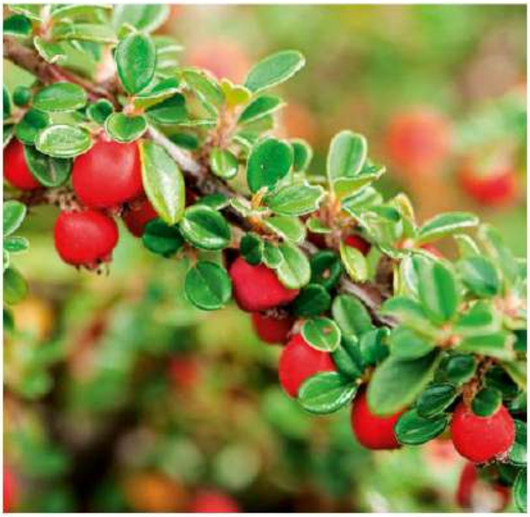
2 *Elaeagnus umbellata*

Also known as autumn olive, this is a large spreading shrub with grey-green foliage. “It bears fragrant flowers in May followed by masses of round, red fruits speckled buff-white,” notes John. Native to Asia, this vigorous plant is considered invasive on the north-east coast of the USA, reaching 8m in height and spread.



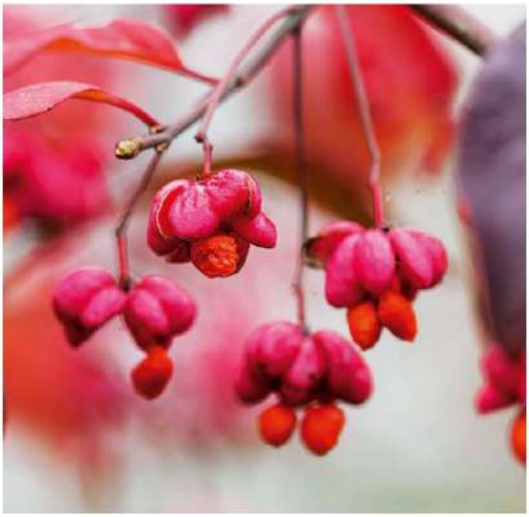
3 *Callicarpa bodinieri* ‘Profusion’

Bodinier’s beautyberry is named for Émile-Marie Bodinier, a French botanist and Catholic priest, who collected plants from China in the 1890s. “It’s one of the most stand-out berried shrubs for autumn, with purple fruits in great abundance,” says John. Grow it in full sun or partial shade and it can reach up to 3m tall.



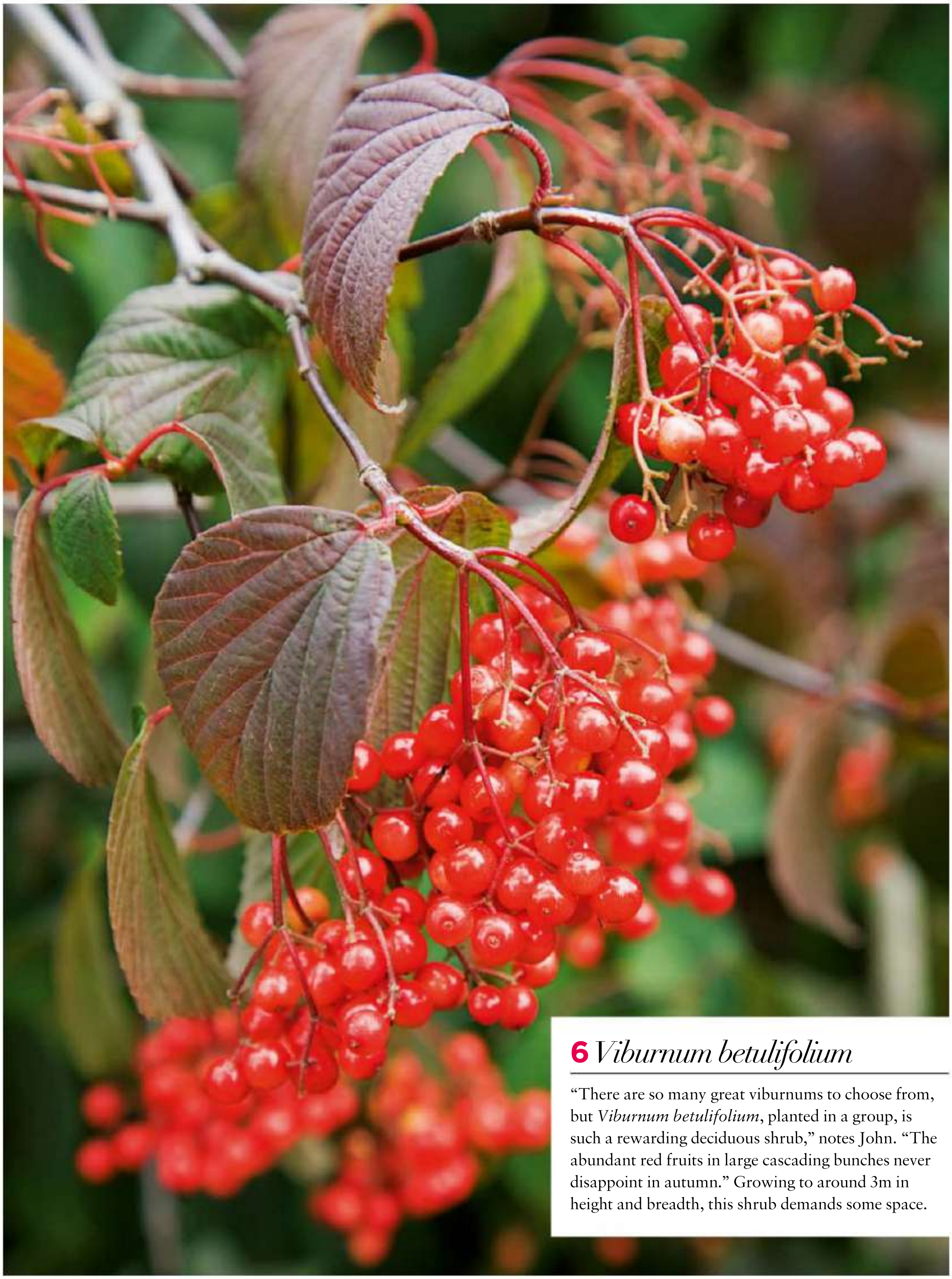
4 *Cotoneaster horizontalis*

Also known as wall spray, this cotoneaster has a spreading habit and will reach about 1m in height and 2m wide. “It is one of the best groundcover plants and bears masses of white flowers in spring, which are a magnet for bees,” John points out. “Come autumn the bright red berries complement other seasonal shades.”



5 *Euonymus europaeus* ‘Red Cascade’

“Even in late summer the fruits of this plant are evident. It’s a large shrub with arching branches and rich autumn colours,” says John. Flowers start off yellow but turn to a bright reddish-pink as the season progress, opening to reveal orange berries within. The leaves also turn a rich orange-red. Grows to 3m.



6 *Viburnum betulifolium*

"There are so many great viburnums to choose from, but *Viburnum betulifolium*, planted in a group, is such a rewarding deciduous shrub," notes John. "The abundant red fruits in large cascading bunches never disappoint in autumn." Growing to around 3m in height and breadth, this shrub demands some space.

IMAGES SHUTTERSTOCK; GARDEN WORLD IMAGES; CLIVE NICHOLS

7 *Ugni molinae*

"The Chilean guava is an ideal, slow-growing, evergreen myrtle with small, glossy, green leathery leaves and soft, pink, waxy pendulous flowers. The mahogany berries that follow are edible, delicious and sweetly aromatic," John observes. Keep this shrub in a sheltered position away from cold easterly winds in winter.

8 *Decaisnea fargesii*

Also known as the blue bean shrub, *D. fargesii* comes from western China and reaches 8m in height and breadth in ideal conditions. "It is such an interesting shrub with yellow-green flowers in spring followed by large pinnate leaves that turn yellow in autumn to reveal clusters of metallic blue broad bean-like pods," says John.

9 *Ilex* x *altaclerensis* 'Lady Valerie'

"This is a great shrub for winter foliage," notes John. "It has a golden marbling and dark green edging, with bright red berries." This distinctive holly is not readily available, so consider also 'Golden King', with bright red berries and gold-trimmed foliage, or 'Lawsoniana', which is also variegated but with duller berries.

10 *Berberis wilsoniae*

This is a small, semi-evergreen shrub with a rounded habit and thorny stems. "The leaves often turn an orangey-red when the coral fruits appear in late autumn," says John, who recommends it for a front-of-border position. Indigenous to western China, it will reach a height of 1m and performs best in full sun or part shade.

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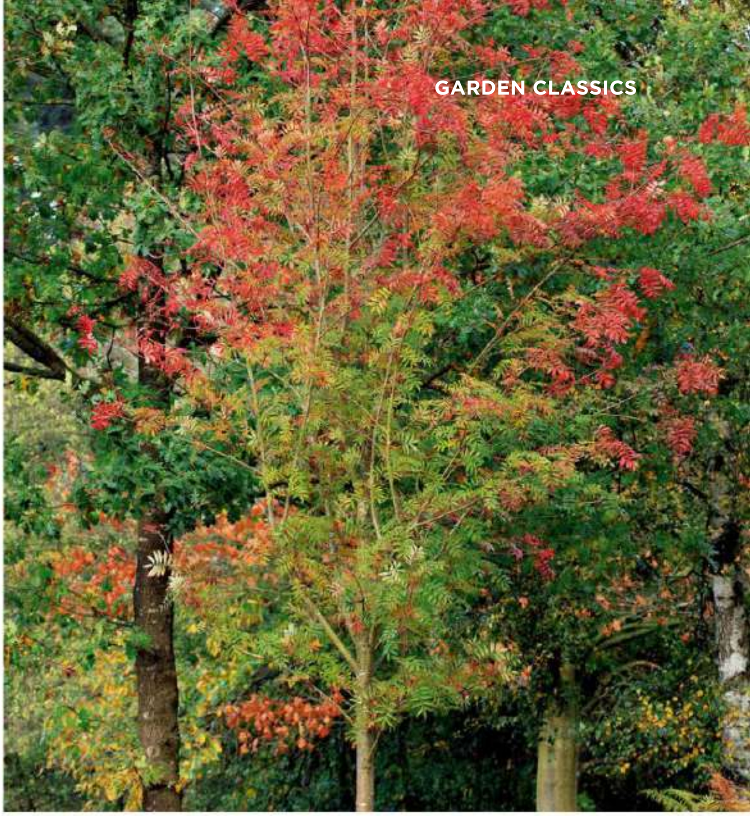


Tree of Life

Sorbus is steeped in folklore and its bright berries and foliage make it a super choice for the autumn garden

Our native rowan or mountain ash, *Sorbus aucuparia*, comes into its own at this time of year. A tidy subject for both urban streets and gardens great and small, it is fairly inconspicuous throughout summer, with neat, pinnate leaves, but in autumn it is resplendent in its seasonal finery. Orange-red berries arrive first, followed by fiery, burnished leaves that glow in low sun and make a great counterpoint to heavy autumn and winter skies. Perhaps it is a fitting plant for this time of year when Halloween and All Souls Day loom large. In folklore, *S. aucuparia* was grown to ward off witches and prevent the dead from rising from their graves. The berries remain in place long after the leaves fall.

Sorbus aria, the common whitebeam, is another indigenous species, while in Devon, an endemic species, *S. devoniensis*, is the result of a particular ability to produce seed without conventional fertilisation. This feature has fascinated botanists for decades and results in distinct populations with limited distribution, as the Cambridge University Botanic Garden, which holds a substantial collection, points out.

There are between 100 and 200 clear species in the sorbus genus, which is spread across the temperate northern hemisphere, from Japan to Alaska in the north and Portugal to Taiwan in the south. There are also selective breeding programmes that have given gardeners and would-be collectors a great choice of ornamental specimens. Try *S. cashmiriana*, originating from the western Himalayas, with its large, off-white, marble-like berries, and *S. vilmorinii*, which has a natural range from Tibet to south-central China and berries with a puce blush.

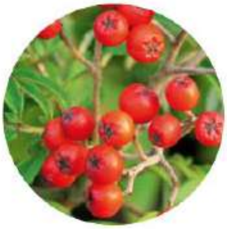
While sorbus are small trees, they are trees nonetheless, so a large garden would be needed to build up a collection. It is possible, however, to source unusual specimens for a distinctive and lasting addition to a front garden, for instance. Burncoose Nurseries, Hillier Nurseries and Frank P. Matthews are good places to start. ■

HOW TO GROW

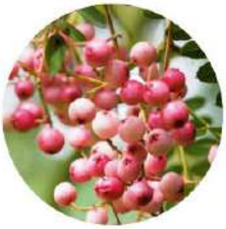
With a spread of 5m, sorbus trees reach 7m in 10-20 years, although some will be taller. Keep roots shaded in free-draining, cultivated soil. You can grow sorbus species from seed sown in a mixture of sand and compost, but varieties won't come true.

WORDS VIVIENNE HAMBLY **IMAGES** GAP/HOWARD RICE/MARK BOLTON/CLIVE NICHOLS/ELKE BORKOWSKI/RON EVANS

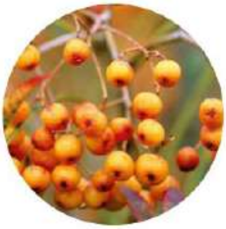
Sorbus: Cultivars and species for colourful leaves and berries



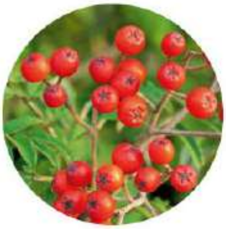
Sorbus cashmiriana The Kashmir rowan has big berries that birds ignore.



Sorbus vilmorinii Hardy, with fine, fern-like leaves and berries that are flushed deep pink.



***Sorbus* 'Copper Kettle'** Grows to 5m and produces masses of coppery-orange berries.



***Sorbus* 'Chinese Lace'** Delicate, lacy foliage takes on spectacular colours in autumn.

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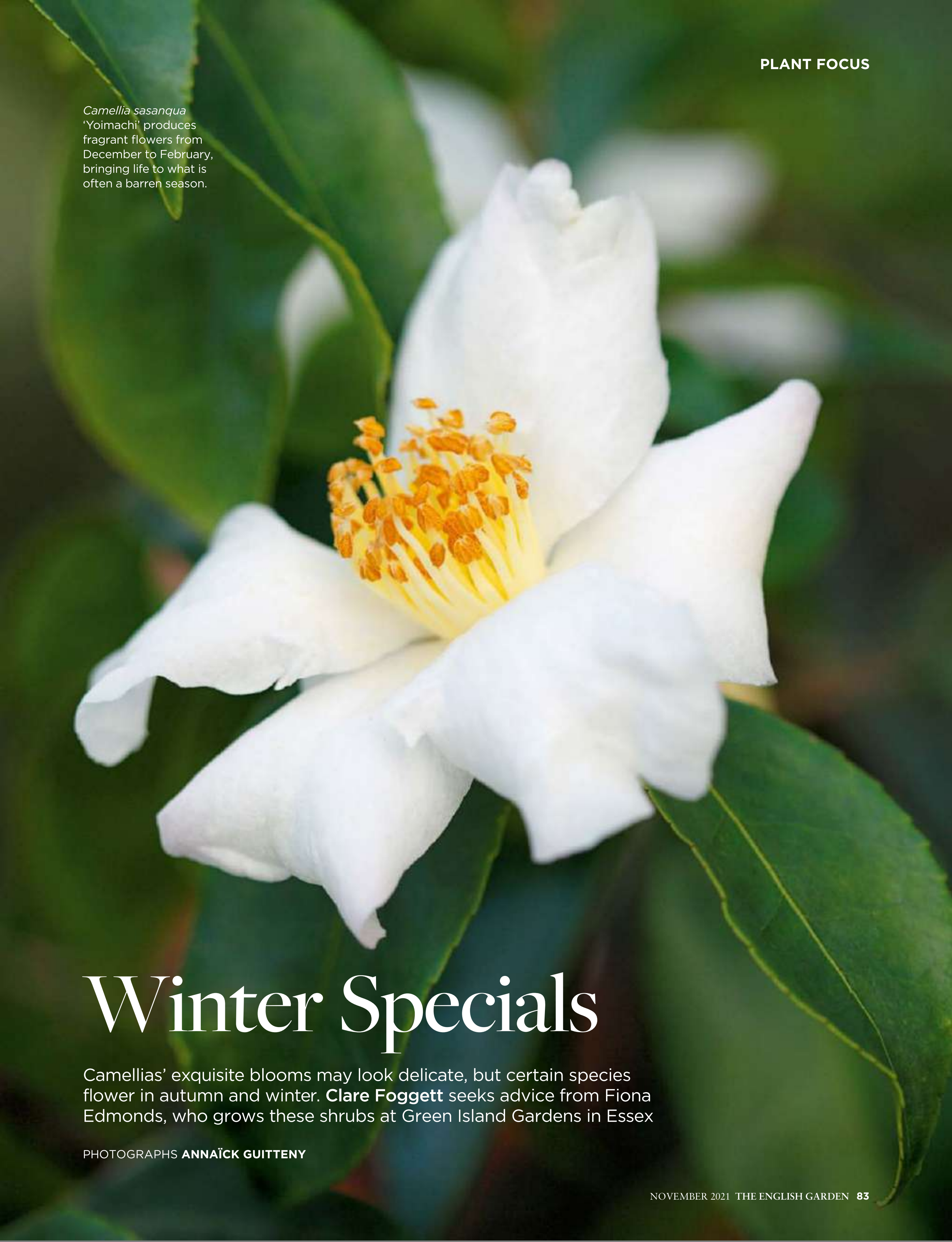

Camellia sasanqua 'Yoimachi' produces fragrant flowers from December to February, bringing life to what is often a barren season.

Winter Specials

Camellias' exquisite blooms may look delicate, but certain species flower in autumn and winter. **Clare Foggett** seeks advice from Fiona Edmonds, who grows these shrubs at Green Island Gardens in Essex

PHOTOGRAPHS **ANNAÏCK GUITTENY**

Above The plentiful October-November flowers of easy-to-grow *Camellia sasanqua* 'Hugh Evans'.

Camellias are indelibly associated with spring, when in gardens across the country plump buds open into exquisite pink, red and white flowers among these shrubs' glossy green leaves. The flowers are almost unreal in their perfection: layer on layer of petals flawlessly arranged, conjuring thoughts of the parts of the world camellias originated from: Japan, China and other countries in eastern and southern Asia.

Yet these are not the easiest shrubs to grow. They prefer acid soil and all it takes is one ill-timed hard spring frost for your beautiful camellia to be turned into a mass of sad, brown petals. This is a compelling reason to consider the less widely known and grown autumn and winter-flowering camellias instead. According to Fiona Edmond, owner of Green Island Gardens in Essex, they're easier to grow than their spring-flowering counterparts *and* they're nicer.

Fiona grows a wide range of autumn camellias, both in the woodland gardens around her home, and for sale in her plant nursery. She's been working on the gardens at Green Island in Ardleigh since 1996: at first the acre or two around the house, then moving out until the entire 20-acre site was developed. She had already studied garden design at Inchbald, combining work as a designer with her other incredible talent: playing competitive golf. Just this summer, Fiona was crowned English Senior Women's Amateur Champion 2021.

It was the search for year-round interest in her garden's woodland areas that led her to autumn camellias. "My philosophy is that a garden should look good all year round, so as soon as I discovered camellias that flower in autumn I thought 'I'll try a few of those,'" Fiona recalls. "And as soon as I tried a couple, I fell in love with them. It quickly became apparent what fantastic shrubs they are. Their leaves are smaller and glossier; their new foliage can be bright red; and while the flowers aren't as big and blowsy as spring camellias – they tend to be single or semi-double – they're beautifully scented, and more in proportion with the shrub."

In her woodland garden, autumn camellias seemed an obvious choice. "They like the conditions, they look natural, and our soil is very acidic so I knew camellias would grow well," she observes. That said, if you don't have acidic soil, don't be put off. "They are fine in neutral soil," Fiona confirms. "The autumn-flowering ones are definitely more tolerant of less favourable conditions, and in neutral soil they won't get the chlorosis [yellowing] that you get with the spring-flowering varieties."

So, which to start with? "For a beginner, I would suggest 'Hugh Evans' because it's the easiest to get hold of and the easiest to grow," Fiona advises. "It starts to flower in late September or early October, and some will still be going in March." A cultivar of

Top left 'Dwarf Shishi' is a compact grower that's good in containers. **Top right** 'Gay Sue' has the strongest fragrance. **Above** Fiona's choice for red flowers is *Camellia sasanqua* 'Crimson King'. **Left** Flushed pink flowers of *Camellia* 'Rainbow'.

Camellia sasanqua, 'Hugh Evans' has lovely, deep-pink, fragrant flowers with a golden centre and will ultimately reach around 2m tall. Other autumn-flowering *C. sasanqua* varieties include: peony-like, white-flowered 'Gay Sue', which, Fiona says, is the best for scent; 'Lavender Queen'; 'Rainbow', with its pink-flushed flowers that vary in their degree of colour from season to season; 'Crimson King', which is Fiona's top pick for red flowers; and cerise 'Dwarf Shishi'. Generally, *Camellia sasanqua* flower from around October to November, have a graceful open habit and eventually reach around 2 metres in height.

The closely related species *Camellia hiemalis* helps to extend the season, with cultivars such as bright pink 'Kanjiro' and 'Shishigashira' flowering from November into December. 'Kanjiro' tends to be one for patient gardeners, however, because as Fiona points out: "It can take a little while for it to get going and start flowering."

Then, look to *Camellia* x *vernalis* 'Yuletide' for festive crimson flowers between November and January and 'Yoimachi' for December-February flowers in white with the palest flush of pink. Also flowering between December and February is 'Sugar Dream', a confection of pink flowers with a boss

of creamy yellow petaloids in the centre. It is one of Fiona's favourite cultivars – "it flowers for ages and ages," she points out – while she notes that the pale flowers of 'Yoimachi' have an excellent scent. "The paler flowers tend to be more strongly fragrant," she reveals. Then, before you know it, it's spring – all you need do is grow an early-flowering cultivar of *Camellia* x *williamsii* such as 'November Pink', which flowers from November to March, and the continuity of beautiful flowers is complete.

These camellias have very varied habits: "Some of them grow distinctly upright, almost like a small tree, and some, like 'Hugh Evans' are more shrub-like and bushy," Fiona explains. But as she also points out, you can train them against a fence or wall if you're short on space. This would also be a good way to grow those varieties that prefer a little shelter and warmth. Out in the garden, try underplanting them with shade-lovers like epimedium, autumn-flowering cyclamen or spring-flowering bulbs. You can also grow these camellias as an informal, evergreen hedge. "If you prune it after it's flowered then you will still get all the blooms the following season – and they're a bit more adventurous than privet!" Fiona adds. ■

Above left The fittingly named, 'Yuletide' usually flowers at Christmas. **Top right** 'Sugar Dream' has showy anemone-form flowers with a centre of creamy-yellow petaloids. **Above right** 'November Pink', a pretty, early-flowering variety of *Camellia* x *williamsii*.

Green Island Gardens, Park Road, Ardleigh, Essex CO7 7SP. Tel: 01206 230455; greenislandgardens.co.uk

CULTIVATION ADVICE

Growing autumn camellias

Fiona Edmonds' advice for growing these floriferous shrubs

Textbooks say you should grow autumn camellias only in a sheltered spot, but Fiona says the common varieties you'll find offered for sale tend to be the hardiest, and those in her garden have come through two winters when temperatures have dropped as low as -15°C.

The most important thing for these shrubs is consistent moisture content in the soil, which should be moist but well-drained. It's especially important that they don't run out of water around July and August, because that's when the flower buds form.

Autumn-flowering camellias are happy growing in sun or shade, but Fiona says they flower much better if they have sun, and grows hers on the edges of her woodland plantings to ensure they get enough.

In containers, Fiona doesn't use ericaceous (acid) compost, and instead finds her camellias thrive in general purpose compost. Choose a more compact variety such as 'Dwarf Shishi' for growing in a pot.

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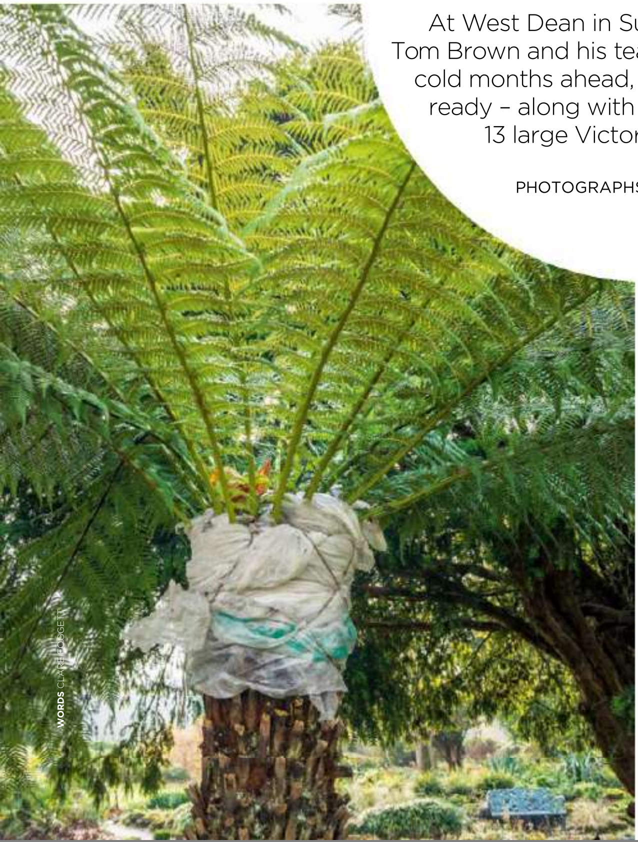
Winter is Coming

At West Dean in Sussex, head gardener Tom Brown and his team are preparing for the cold months ahead, by getting the garden ready – along with its beautiful range of 13 large Victorian glasshouses

PHOTOGRAPHS **ANDREA JONES**



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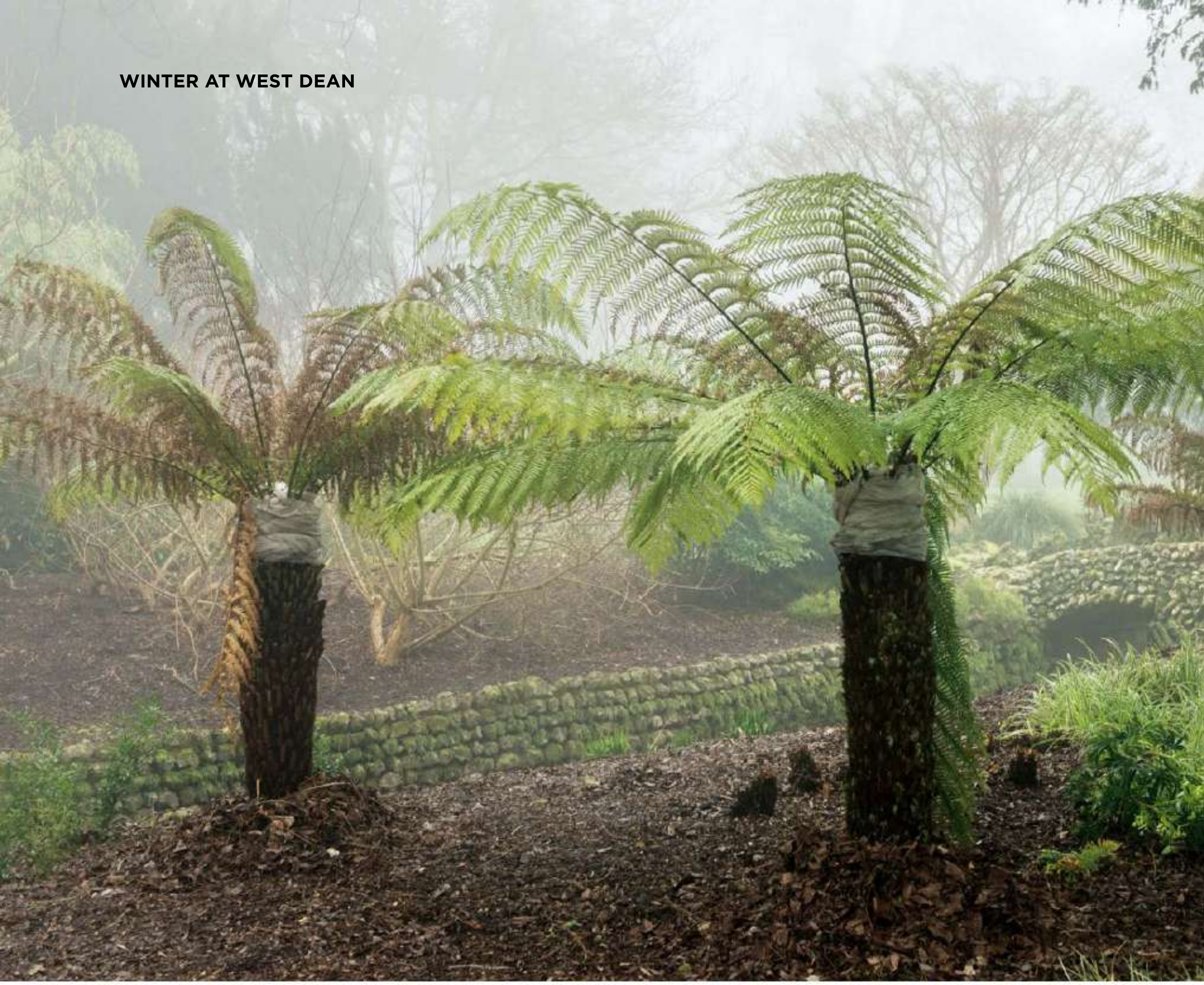

Above Graceful tree ferns have their growing points protected with fleece. It's washed when it's removed and used again, year after year.

These days few gardeners put their garden 'to bed' for winter, as was common in the past. Milder winter weather, year-round planting, and the fact that many of us enjoy being outdoors during the colder months, mean we no longer batten down the hatches in autumn, retreat indoors, and emerge again in spring.

Still, as autumn turns into winter, some things do need doing to get the garden ready. This quieter time of year is also a good opportunity to take stock, get organised and catch up on those jobs that get put off during busier times, plus any outstanding repairs.

In many gardens that open to the public over spring and summer, closing the gates to visitors at the end of the autumn means there's time to tackle larger jobs and renovation work that might not have been possible earlier in the year. At West Dean Gardens near Chichester, the gates are open all year, but head gardener Tom Brown and his team find plenty of housekeeping jobs to get on with before winter's colder weather strikes.

Protecting tender plants

One of Tom's priorities at this time of year is to protect tender plants – those that need lifting and storing or insulating in situ – to keep them safe from cold or freezing temperatures. After a winter when he experimented with leaving tree ferns unprotected, Tom now wraps their crowns up warm. "I think this was a practice that started when tree ferns were considered to be more exotic than we know now, but without it you could tell that their growth was checked," says Tom. Now he leaves the fronds intact and winds horticultural fleece through them, bundling it around the growing point. "It keeps them ticking over: you don't get that dipping of the clutch that you would if you left them, and you'll

Above Cleaning the glasshouses is a priority before winter kicks in. **Left** Succulents are potted into small containers to spend winter under glass. **Below** Tender cannas are lifted well before the first hard frosts strike.

only need to take off the odd frond rather than the whole set."

Other plants, like cannas, are lifted and stored, but last winter Tom left dahlia tubers in the ground to overwinter for the first time. After the dahlias had been frosted, they were cut back and a sheet of plastic laid over them (two black bin bags would be fine). Next, a wheelbarrow-full of compost was poured on top to pin the plastic to the ground. "In effect, you're covering where the main body of the tuber is underground, keeping it insulated and dry with plastic and compost," explains Tom. In spring, you pull out the bin bags, leaving the layer of mulch – "like those guys who whip the tablecloth off a table and leave the cutlery and glasses on it!" About 80 per cent of the dahlias came through winter with this treatment, including big blocks of 'Karma Choc' and 'Thomas A. Edison'. "There are risks, but if you lift dahlias there are risks involved. We're really happy with this method," he adds.

Cleaning and tidying

If you're a serious greenhouse gardener, it's always a good idea to give your glass a really good scrub, inside and out, before winter. With 13 large Victorian glasshouses to look after at West Dean, cleaning them all takes some time, not to mention the logistics of juggling their contents. "When we get rid of all the annual crops – the peppers, aubergines,

Top left Each terracotta pot in West Dean's huge collection is washed by hand every winter. **Above right** The glasshouses are used for autumnal displays of pumpkins and gourds. **Above left** Glass and woodwork is scrubbed inside and out, for all 13 greenhouses.

chillies, tomatoes – that's when we start the cleaning process, outside and in," says Tom. "We give the glass a good clean on the outside and then wash the woodwork to get any grime off. Then we start inside, scrubbing the painted woodwork to get rid of dirt, both from an aesthetic point of view, and also to upset any pests overwintering in those spaces. We use soapy water and scrubbing brushes, followed by horticultural disinfectant, and we leave it all to dry before re-introducing plants again."

Since Tom and his team don't use pesticides and rely on biological controls in the greenhouses, this level of cleanliness is essential. "If you've got a good-sized population of pests, it's very difficult to bring it under control. But if you give everything a good clean, and start with a reasonably clean slate, you can maintain it," he points out.

Tom also uses this opportunity to check on West Dean's collections of plants, including ferns and begonias. There should be two specimens of every plant, so as the cleaning progresses, like is put with like and a quick stock take is carried out to inform the following season's propagation.

It's not just the glasshouses that are scrubbed and cleaned. All of West Dean's pots are washed and dried before being stored away for winter, too. At this time of year when pots are being emptied of annual crops or ornamentals, an hour or so a day is spent keeping on top of their washing. "It's worth it so that when spring arrives and you need them for repotting, they're ready to go," Tom advises.

Pruning and training

Another winter job under glass at West Dean is taking care of the grape vine. "We give the vine a good prune in the winter when the sap's low," says Tom. All the annual rods are pruned back to the vine's main framework, which is dropped down from the rafters. Every couple of years, the bark that's built up on the main rods is peeled back

– "It's where the wretched mealybugs hide," Tom explains. "With annual crops, you get rid of their pests when you get rid of the plant, but where you've got permanent plants in the greenhouse, the nectarines, vines, fig and apricots, you have to be particularly vigilant in terms of pests."

Outside, it's the turn of the apples and pears. West Dean is known for its apple collection, many of which are trained into exquisite shapes. In summer they're pruned to remove that year's growth, then in winter any further regrowth is removed, the trees' structure and framework is maintained, and fruiting spurs might be thinned if necessary.

Once all the blackberries have been picked, their canes are pruned and trained too. "They fruit on two-year-old wood, and throughout the growing season new shoots erupt from the middle, which you tie in to a fan shape, before cutting off all the fruited canes at the base," Tom explains. West Dean's blackberries are 'Oregon Thornless' and they'll be pruned in October, "although there's no reason why you can't do it later, as long as you can identify the woody, fruited canes from the new ones", says Tom.

Top left Pruning summer regrowth on the trained forms of apple trees. **Above right** Tying new stems of climbing roses into place on the garden's pergola. **Above left** The grapevine is lowered from the rafters so it can be pruned and checked for pests hiding in its bark.

One job Tom prefers to save until later in winter is pruning the garden's rambling roses. "On a frosty morning when it's too cold to work with other plants, rose pruning is a good thing to go out and do – and you can see what you're doing." West Dean's roses are beautifully trained up pillars, and this is the time when new stems are identified to replace older, tired ones and tied into the right position.

Beds and borders

At West Dean, composting is done on a grand scale, with huge bays of homemade compost always on the go and tractors turning their contents. "Our flinty, chalky, free-draining soil is very hungry and the more compost we can produce, the better," says Tom. "The material gets stacked up during the year, and then we hire a big shredding machine to process

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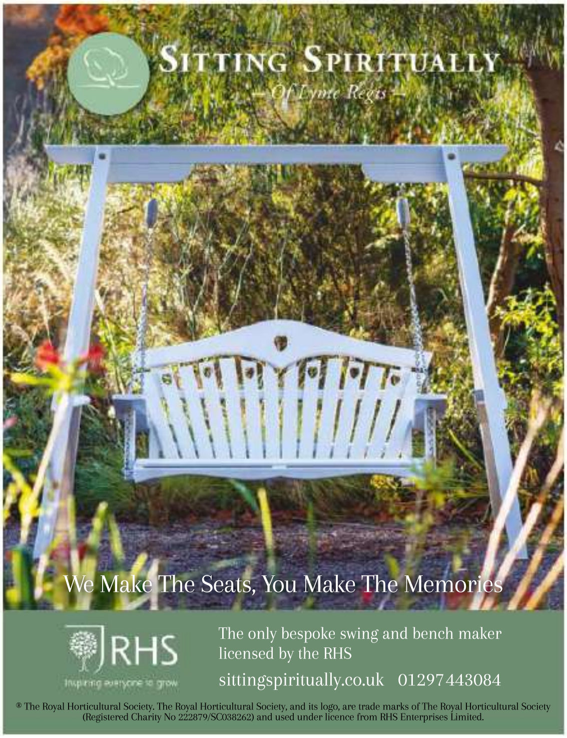
a whole year's worth of waste. At home, get a garden shredder, or just run the lawn mower over the lawn to chop up any leaves before putting them on the heap." The resulting compost is spread over borders as a mulch, mostly in March and April, but earlier in areas with bulbs such as snowdrops.

In the formal borders in the walled garden, Tom starts to cut down old growth in around October or November. "You can cut the perennials down and trim topiary in the same breath," he maintains. The garden's topiary is pruned any time from September to Christmas. "The only danger of doing it later is that they look crisp for a shorter amount of time," notes Tom. "In the walled garden, where we plant alliums and tulips with the perennials, it's a good process to cut the perennials down in autumn, plant the bulbs and add a layer of mulch so the tulips can punch up through it in spring. Elsewhere, in the wider grounds, the style of planting is less stiff, with things like helianthus and sanguisorbas there for their seedheads as much as everything else – so we let those perennials persist until the spring."

Tom adds that it can be hard work clearing large beds of soggy perennials in the autumn. "By January everything is dry and crisp and it takes less time: just shred the dried herbaceous plants. In autumn, plants like agapanthus are still green and 'snotty'. It's horrible when they stick to your gloves!" ■

West Dean Gardens, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 0QZ. Tel: 01243 818318; *westdean.org.uk*

Top The formal borders in the walled garden are cut back in autumn when bulbs are planted. **Above** Vast quantities of compost are made from garden waste; a year's worth of woody stems is shredded in autumn to add to the heaps.



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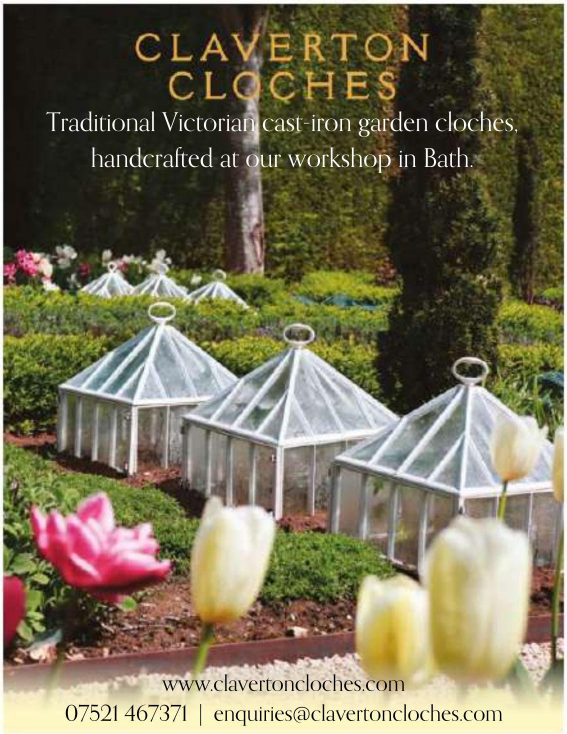

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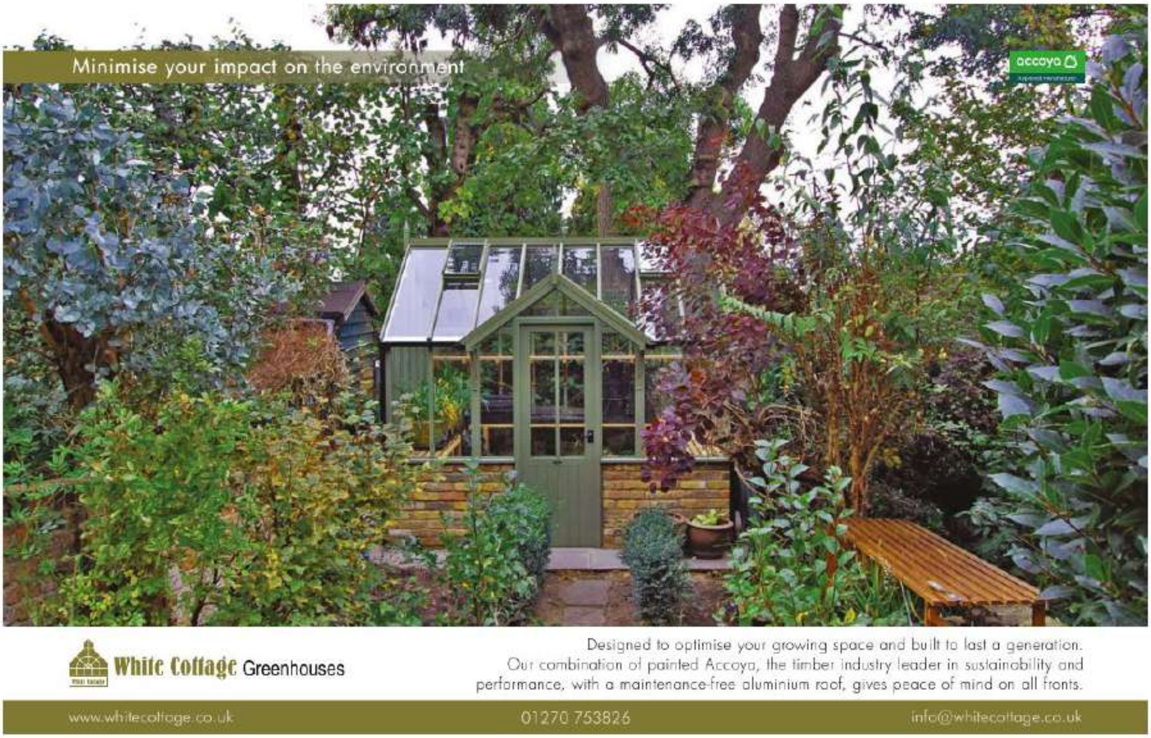

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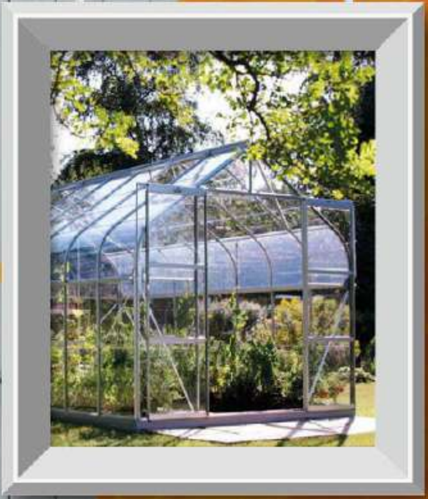

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What Lies Beneath

Underrated, misunderstood and abused: soil has come in for quite a bashing over the decades. **Sue Bradley** speaks to some of its champions and discovers why we should all be paying more attention to it

Techniques such as mulching are already widely practised by gardeners, putting them ahead of the curve when it comes to soil care.

IMAGE GAP

Above The foundation for healthy plants, soil is the garden's most important element and should be looked after. **Right** Composting garden waste results in top-quality, free-of-charge soil conditioner.

Soil is the Cinderella of the garden: the quietly hard-working foundation for healthy plants and a weapon in the battle against climate change. This complex blend of minerals, humus, living organisms, gas and water has always been with us, yet we still have much to learn about what goes on beneath its surface and how best to look after it.

Campaigners are calling for greater attention to be paid to soil health, with the government urged to consider it a national priority alongside clean air and water. Campaigners point to research that states the UK has lost 84% of its fertile topsoil since 1850, with what remains being destroyed at ten times the rate it is created. This not only affects gardeners and farmers, but also has an impact on the country's resilience to both high rainfall and drought.

The importance of soil was brought to the fore by the Yeo Valley Organic Garden at this year's RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Designed by Tom Massey in collaboration with Sarah Mead, it set out to prove how putting nature first brings great benefits for the soil and its dependent wildlife and plant biodiversity.

Top left A mulch of well-rotted manure boosts soil's organic content. **Top middle** Inorganic fertilisers lead to poorer soil in the long-term. **Top right** Carbon is stored in soil's top 30cm. **Above right** Sarah Mead. **Above left** Arable soil holds less carbon.

IMAGES GAP/THOMAS ALAMY/FHF GREENMEDIA/ROBERT MABIC; ALAMY

Sarah designed and runs the Yeo Valley Organic Garden in Somerset, and her attitude to good soil health is informed by practices on her family's farm, which she says has 'rubbed off' onto her team. "Soil is the unsung hero," she says. "Traditional gardeners talk about feeding and weeding, but for us it's all about the health of the soil.

"Even from a selfish point of view, if we can get it right, it makes our life easier. A lot of our soil work concerns its texture – opening it up and making it easier to work with, keeping it moist and full of nutrients. The garden team here would say that we have work to do on the soil, especially since we're on heavy clay. We're not in any way saying 'look at us, our soil is blooming marvellous'. What we're saying is that it all starts with the soil."

"A lot of our soil work concerns its texture – opening it up and making it easier to work with, keeping it moist and full of nutrients" **SARAH MEAD**

Over at Rothamsted Research in Hertfordshire, the not-for-profit research centre that's home to the oldest continuous agronomic experiments in the world, microbiologist Professor Andy Neal applauds Sarah's message. He and his colleagues can compare soils that have received applications of organic or inorganic fertilisers since the 1850s with those that have remained untouched.

"During the Industrial Revolution, when people moved from the country into cities, there was a

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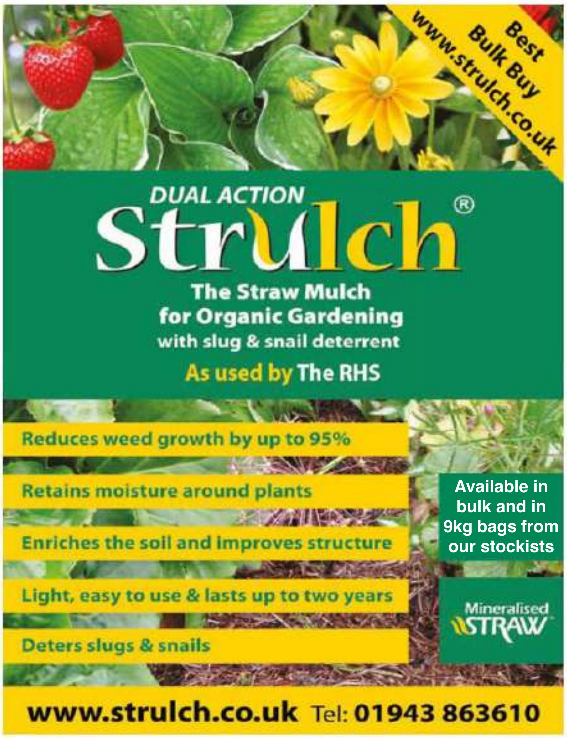

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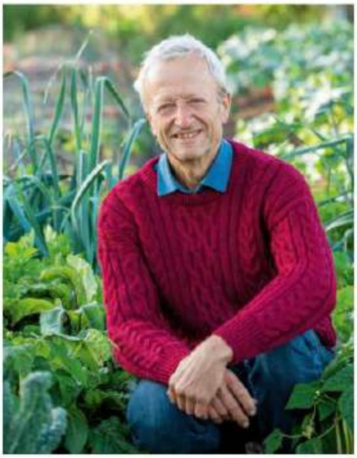

> *"Over many decades I've found that two to four centimetres of reasonable-quality compost is taken into the soil over the course of a year"*
>
> **CHARLES DOWDING**

concern that agriculture would be unable to create the yields of crops needed to feed people, and that there wasn't enough farm manure to support soil fertility. There was subsequently a lot of interest in alternative sources of nutrients to augment manures," Andy explains.

Yet while the first inorganic phosphorous fertiliser created by Rothamsted's founder Sir Henry Laws, and the many products that followed, proved effective in ensuring sufficient fertility for abundant crops, comparisons of soils from the centre show distinct differences in levels of organic carbon and living organisms, such as bacteria and earthworms.

"All soils are different, but if you look at Harpenden where our experiments are based, we've found that the organically managed pastures contain 80 tonnes of organic carbon per hectare in the top 30cm, while arable soils that have received inorganic fertilisers over a century have half of these stocks.

"Plots starved of organic matter inputs for 50 years exhibit a pore network that's severely degraded; soil has slumped and collapsed, it puddles when it rains and dries out rapidly when it doesn't. The rightful place of soil is at the heart of the carbon cycle but we have been creating unbalanced soils in terms of carbon and this has a huge effect on nutrients and efficiency in the way they're taken up by plants.

"Soil has an important role to play in tackling climate change: one reason why there's so much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is that a great part of it is not where it should be: in the soil. At the same time, carbon is directly related to soil fertility and plant nutrition."

Many gardeners appear to be ahead of the curve when it comes to adding humus, such as compost, to their soil, even if they're not always clear as to why it's so important. "The improved water-holding capacity of the soil affects how nutrients are retained, and the availability of moisture during both prolonged periods of rain and droughts," Andy explains. "Think of the connection of soil pores as a road network: a well-connected road system offering many routes from A to B is more resilient than having just one route, which gets cut off if there are roadworks."

With the importance of organic matter firmly established, the question for scientists at Rothamsted is the best way to get it into the soil; compost, farmyard manures and digestates are among the forms under consideration. "The process of breaking down organic matter is implicitly linked to soil quality," Andy says. "Carbon is most effective at creating the all-important structure when it's small enough to stick to mineral particles in the soil."

At the Yeo Valley Organic Garden, the 'no dig' method is increasingly used, with leafmould and compost created from garden refuse and a good amount of well-rotted cow manure being spread over the soil as a mulch every autumn. Charles Dowding, who has championed this method for several decades, explains that soil gardened in this way contains more 'micro-life' as a result of not being disturbed. "This includes larger organisms such as earthworms and millipedes, mycorrhizal and other fungal threads, and many single cell organisms or microbes," he explains.

Top A 5cm-deep layer of mulch applied in spring keeps weeds down and maintains soil moisture, while encouraging more micro-organisms.
Above right Passionate advocate of mulching and the no-dig method, Charles Dowding.
Above left Leafmould is a great way to recycle autumn's fallen leaves and boost soil health.

IMAGES GAP/JONATHAN BUCKLEY/HEATHER EDWARDS; ALAMY

Above The pretty flowers of phacelia, a green manure, attract beneficial insects. **Right** Chopped down and then dug in, green manure protects the soil surface, then enriches its organic matter content.

"Soil organisms eat and excrete different parts of the compost which is sitting on top of the ground. Organic matter improves soil best when its spread on the surface and isn't incorporated, because this fits with biological activity being most active close to the surface. Over many decades I've found that two to four centimetres of reasonable-quality compost is taken into the soil over the course of a year. The speed of this process depends on how alive soil is."

Another technique embraced at Yeo Valley is biochar, a high-carbon form of charcoal produced through heating organic matter at extremely high temperatures and a process called pyrolysis, which occurs in the absence of oxygen. Initially, Sarah and her team were inspired by the work of Craig Sams at Carbon Gold and are now making their own biochar using wood from ash trees affected by ash dieback. Biochar is said to bring a physical and permanent change to the soil by improving structure, aeration, water-holding capacity and retention of nutrients, as well as providing a refuge for beneficial microbes.

While the overall state of our nation's soils leaves room for improvement, there is praise for gardeners from charity Garden Organic, which says studies by the University of Sheffield have shown that the time-honoured practice of adding plenty of homemade compost and horse manure to our beds and borders has led them to compare more than favourably to agricultural land in certain parts of the country.

Knowledge officer Dr Anton Rosenfeld says the charity recommends the use of compost and green manures, with the latter improving the structure and adding organic matter. "Green manures – plants grown to improve the soil – are underused by gardeners," he says. "We recommend them because they protect the surface of the soil from the weather and stop nutrients being washed out. In addition, they can help break up any compacted layers."

Garden Organic has also tested biochar and says it's received varying results. "It made quite a difference to impoverished soils; in already healthy soils the results are less clear cut," says Anton.

Ellen Fay, founder and executive director of campaigning group the Sustainable Soils Alliance, says gardeners have a very important part to play in improving soil health. "We need a revolutionary change in behaviour and expectations that will be the difference between success and disaster for future generations," she maintains. ■

Good Resources

Carbon Gold
Suppliers of Soil Association-approved organic biochar. *Tel: 0117 244 0032; carbongold.com*

Charles Dowding
Books, courses and workshops on all aspects of soil-conscious no-dig gardening, held in Somerset and online. *charlesdowding.co.uk*

Dalefoot Composts
Peat-free, premium organic composts using sustainable sources of wool and bracken. The range includes Lakeland Gold, which makes a good 'clay-busting' mulch. *Tel: 01931 713281; dalefootcomposts.co.uk*

Garden Organic
Support and information on all aspects of organic garden and soil health, with a demonstration garden near Coventry. *Tel: 024 7630 3517; gardenorganic.org.uk*

Melcourt
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Pro-Grow
Soil Association-certified organic soil conditioner made from green waste compost collected through household recycling and sold by the bag or in bulk. *pro-grow.com*

Strulch
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The Organic Gardening Catalogue
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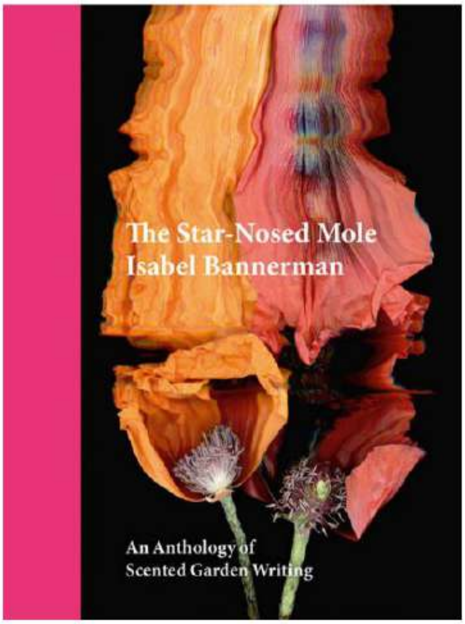
The Reviewer

A selection of the best writing on the shelves this month



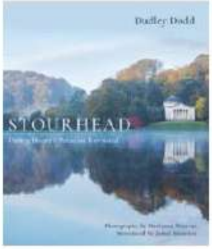
The Star-Nosed Mole

by Isabel Bannerman
Pimpernel Press, £20

Following the success of *Scent Magic*, a lyrical foray into the world of garden scents published in 2019, Isabel Bannerman presents an anthology of writing on the same topic. The garden designer and writer would have us appreciate that scent is life – and that it profoundly influences how we live. The very act of inhaling a scent involves absorbing its molecules, she points out, which is a romantic thought in some instances, less so in others. The book takes its name from the star-nosed mole, which has an acutely developed sense of smell, despite a life spent underground.

Like perfumiers selecting notes for a signature creation, Isabel and her researcher, Violet Hudson, have collated a host of literary snippets here. Presented month by month, they are, like the mole, minutely attuned to aromatic shifts in the year, making this a wonderful book to keep at the bedside through the seasons. The book is paced with Isabel's own digitally produced botanical images.

A bibliography for some of the scientific notes on scent would have been a useful inclusion, as would a few more contemporary entries – most, including those by Proust, Tennyson, Eliot and Rossetti, are out of copyright and therefore easier to reproduce.



Stourhead

by Dudley Dodd
Head of Zeus, £40

Few places are as significant to the English garden landscape as Stourhead. Here, Dudley Dodd revisits the formation of this distinguished property now in the care of the National Trust.

Stourhead has been associated with the Stourton family as far back as records will go, but in 1717 was acquired by 'Good' Henry Hoare, and so began a period in the famed banking family, which lasted until 1947. Here, Dodd, ever meticulous and skilful, explores the contribution made by each generation to the property and, in doing so, reveals their aspirations and tastes, often determined by finance and the evolving fashions of the time.

This is a finely crafted work and its telling is illuminated by magnificent images of the property. It makes a wonderful addition to a library but it is also an important record of the history of one of the country's most splendid estates.

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Expert contributors include Kathryn Bradley-Hole, Ruth Chivers, Noel Kingsbury, Brent Elliott, Toby Musgrave, Charles Quest-Ritson, Clare Coulson and Barbara Segall.

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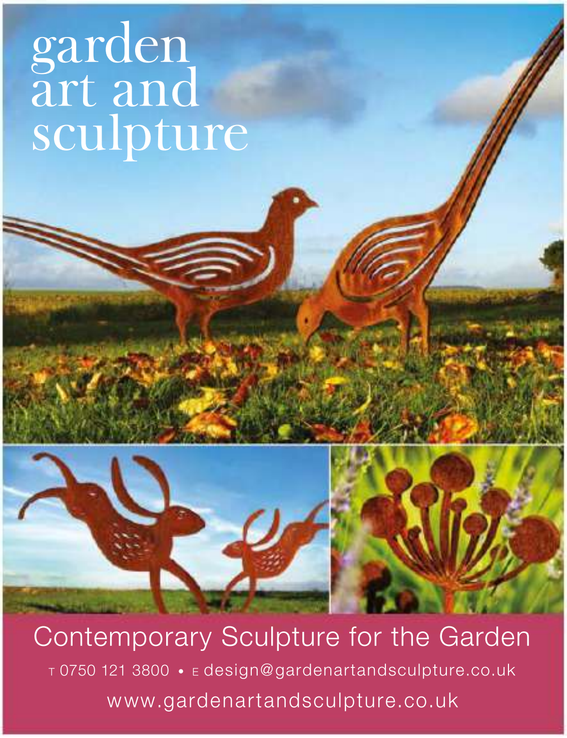

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Q&A

Grace Alexander is a florist, grower and the author of *Grow and Gather* a guide to growing cut flowers. She considers the merits of autumn and advises on starting a cutting garden

Describe an early encounter with plants that played a part in setting you on your course.
Every photograph of me as a child was taken in a garden. The earliest is one of me eating soil and gravel out of an 1980s concrete garden urn, then sitting on the lions at RHS Wisley, then harvesting raspberries in a fruit cage. I am very lucky to have spent my life in and around gardens – I suppose it's only a surprise that I had to go through being a psychologist for so long before I came back to them.

Grow and Gather **is written in the form of a diary. What has keeping a journal brought to your garden practice?**
Everything. I am terrible for getting caught up in the rush of everyday life. It was only when I started writing about my garden and my field that I truly noticed the absolute beauty of it as it is: the ecosystems and the tiny shifts and the changes that take place every day. Through keeping my gardener's journal and sharing it through my newsletter every Sunday night, I found the joy of it.

If a person were to start a new cutting garden, what advice would you give them?
Grow the things that you love, not what everyone else is growing. Grow foliage and texture as well as the big, bold flowers. Plant a few shrubs or perennials early on. No one has every regretted investing in some 'Limelight' hydrangeas. Soil is everything: neglect it at your peril.

What do you look forward to gathering in autumn and winter – both from your garden and hedgerows – and how would you put it to use?
A few years ago, I underplanted my roses with pheasant's tail grass (*Anemanthele lessoniana*) and the coppery, airy seedheads look wonderful. The colour is unlike any other, but I now know that they won't last well in my mild but damp Somerset winter. This autumn I am cutting it right back and weaving it in bunches onto an oversized steel hoop to create a dramatic wreath. Maybe I'll add some dried red orache seedheads and the odd bronze fennel spike.

What would you suggest we do in the garden right now?
This time of year is all about the soil. I grow following biodynamic principles, and the importance of creating a network of life and health in the soil in which you grow cannot be overstated. Imagine breathing. In spring and summer, the soil gives out, and in autumn and winter it needs to take in. Top dress with compost and keep soil covered with plants if you can. What I suggest you don't do is tidy up too much. Leave as much food as you can to get the wildlife through the colder months.

You also sell the seed of what you grow through Grace Alexander Flowers. What are the essentials for successful seed collection and storage?
Seeds need warmth and moisture to germinate, so the best conditions for storage are the opposite: think cool and dry. If the seed comes loose easily in your hand, it is ready for harvest, so be ready with an envelope or a paper bag – never plastic. Once you are sure it is dry, your seed will keep well until you are ready to sow it, provided you keep it in a cool place out of direct sunlight. ■

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Grow and Gather: A Gardener's Guide to a Year of Cut Flowers
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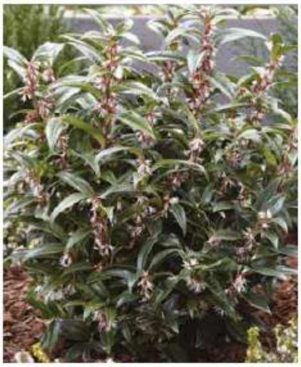

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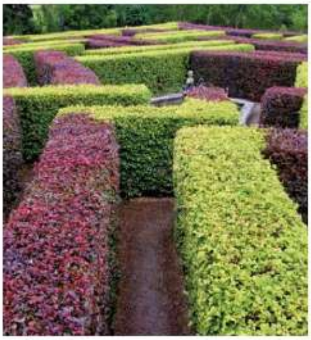

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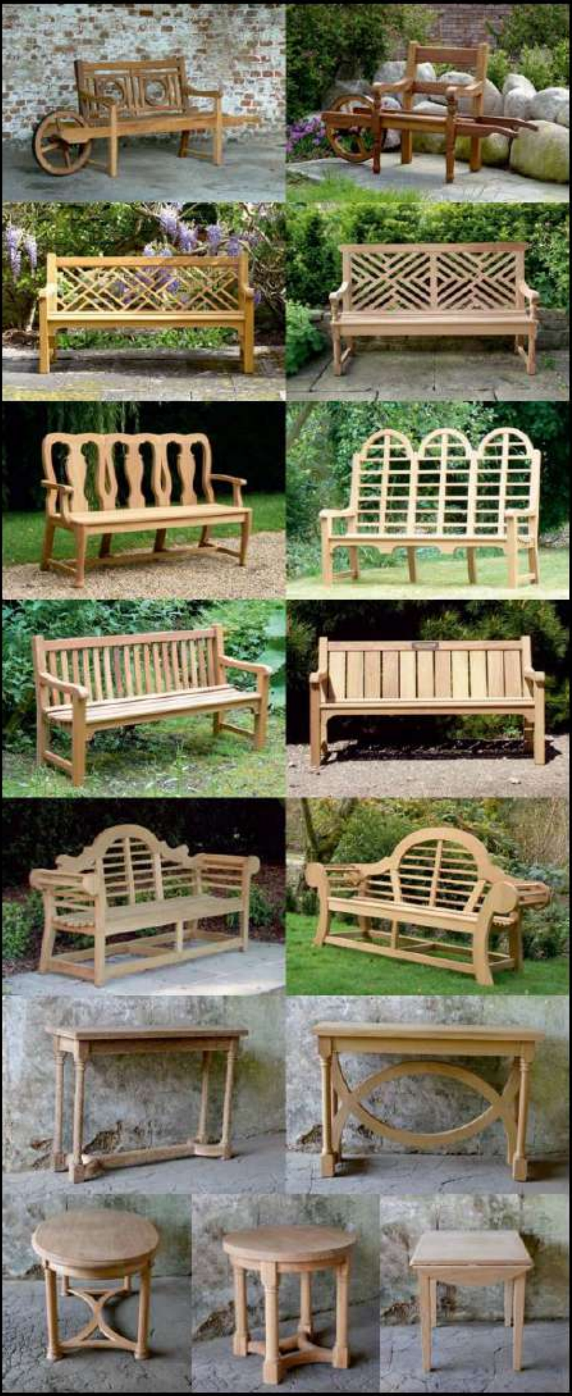

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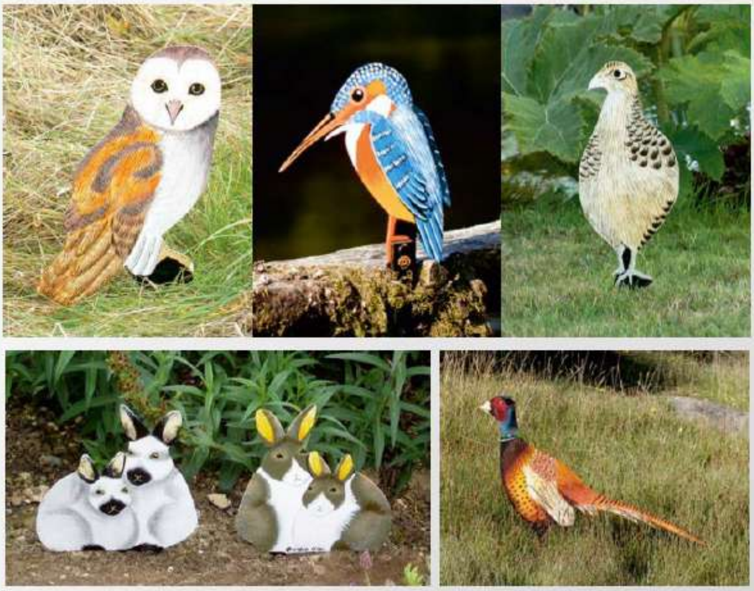

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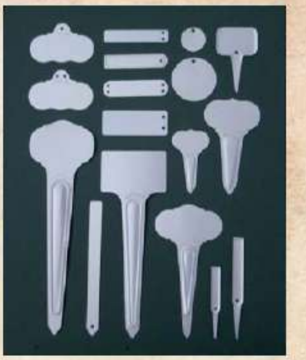

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A Bed of Roses

A tumble of roses amid cottage-style planting looks lovely, but, inspired by the Martins of Stokesay Flowers, **Non Morris** suggests a dedicated patch for cutting

‘We grow the kinds of roses which we like and which our customers like to buy, romantic, scented pillows of bloom mostly in pink, apricot, cream and plum.’ Behind the high brick walls of the old kitchen garden at Stokesay Court, Shropshire, Victoria and Barney Martin grow unashamedly old-fashioned roses and cottage garden flowers, which they supply to a starry list of professional florists. The florists come mostly for the roses and know the range is unsurpassed for its gentle colours and celebration of scent and form. One or two surprise stems of *Rosa* ‘Phyllis Bide’ with its ‘informal …ruffled blooms’ included in an order will not fail to add a subtle lift to a bridal bouquet.

Victoria Martin has now written an intoxicating book, *Favourite Roses for Cutting*, sharing her close observations of the 120 or so roses the pair grow. She notes charmingly that she hesitated to write the book since the garden is still so young ‘but then we have to start somewhere.’ This slim volume is fresh and direct and will make you want to order more roses immediately, autumn being the perfect time to do so.

Roses are saluted for the way they light up the autumn garden – the continuously flowering ‘Bengal Crimson’ may be ‘insignificant and forgettable amongst the dazzling competition of the summer’ but by October it brings ‘graceful beauty and rich cheering colour’. Victoria loves the ‘decadent, voluptuous old-world charm of ‘Charles de Mills’’ and notes helpfully that ‘its gorgeous, pointy, rough apple-green foliage’ continues to look good long after the flowers have gone. I made many new discoveries, including “Ginger Syllabub’, with exquisite pale apricot flowers’ … every florist who sees it apparently ‘goes wild and extremely covetous’ and the sugar pink ‘Wildeve’: ‘put a vase of these distractingly lovely flowers on your desk and you will never get any work done’.

Victoria distinguishes between roses grown in the walled garden for cutting, uncrowded by underplanting and generously mulched, and roses grown in the couple’s cottage garden where they are left to ‘tumble about a bit’ among the hedges. The cottage roses are sweet for a posy on a kitchen table but will not give you the same profusion of strong elegant stems. The art of the cutting patch, growing bulbs and annuals especially, has been revived, but what about giving some space to roses for picking?

> “Florists come mostly for the *roses* and know the range is *unsurpassed* for scent and form”

If you have room, Victoria’s top picks are ‘Ispahan’ ‘an enormous monster of great beauty, irrepressible and utterly healthy’ and ‘Climbing Cecile Brunner’ with ‘curled up little pink rose buds of absolute perfection which unfurl into equally lovely flowers.’ If space is tight she suggests ‘Rosemoor’, which produces small pale pink roses with a green eye that open in succession almost to the ground.

It is hard not to be caught up in Victoria’s passion, whether for growing spires of foxgloves and lupins to emphasise the ‘rounded spilling shapes of the roses’ or for her insistence on picking in the early morning. Reading the book is like discovering a restaurant with a heartfelt chef and a limited hand-written menu, where the food is exquisite and delicious. Get hold of a copy and allow yourself to be seduced. ■

Favourite Roses for Cutting* by Victoria Martin, is available from *stokesayflowers.co.uk

ILLUSTRATION MARIA BURNS **PORTRAIT** RACHEL WARNE

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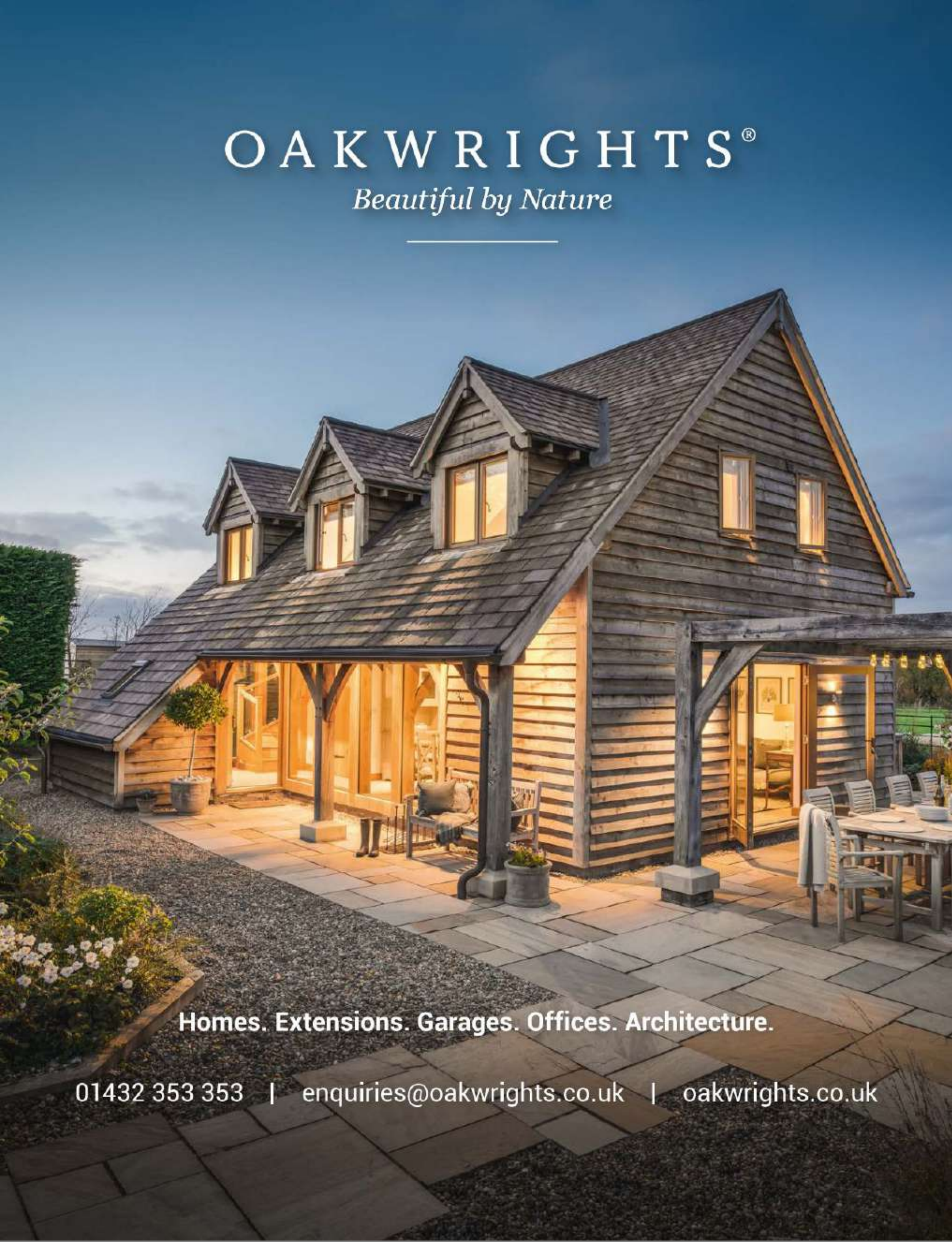

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